

CRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN, INDEED!



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

«And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free»

(John 8:32)

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Thank God that probation centers have been operating in our country (Ukraine) for several years now. It all started with centers of juvenile probation, and then probation centers also opened for adults.

Probation is a form of probation, in which a convict is placed without imprisonment during the probation period established by the court, under the supervision of special officers.

During 2018, 101558 people passed through the probation system in our country (Ukraine) who were serving a suspended sentence not related to deprivation of liberty. Repeated crimes during the serving of punishment were committed by 2,026 people (1.99 %).

While preparing for release, probation centers help find a place of residence (for more than 2000 people), employment (996 people), coordination of social patronage (557 people), placement in special institutions for released convicts over thirty-five years after release (97 people).

Over 1,052 public organizations work helping newly released inmates.



«In the way of righteousness is life; on it's path there is no death»

With the assistance of international and national experts, taking into account international experience, new tools for working with convicts have been developed and implemented.

Based on the above statistics, we can safely say that today the reform, carried out in the penitentiary system of our country (Ukraine), already has its results. But it is also not superfluous today to appeal to all those who are currently undergoing a probation, especially to the younger generation.

Friends, do value the fact that you are given a chance today to pass your punishment without imprisonment. Believe me, today many would like to be in your place, specifically those who are incarcerated. Don't listen to what others say, freedom cannot be replaced by anything but freedom itself.

Behind my back are twenty-five years of uninterrupted imprisonment, and I can affirmatively say that there is nothing good in custody. Until a person comes into contact with a prison, in his head a prison seems to be something romantic, like in a movie or chanson (like «Vladimirsky central, north wind...» or something like that). In fact, every romance disappears from the very moment a person crosses the prison threshold. Everything bright and good remains behind. Ahead, only the stench mixed with emptiness, cowardice, cruelty, lies and hypocrisy. All the rights that a free person enjoys in freedom, immediately turn into powerlessness, for all are subject to restrictions and an established regime of detention.

During the years of my long imprisonment, I had to meet with many people who spent half of their lives in prisons and more, that is, forty and fifty years in prison. In all these sad cases, I never heard from them that they were used to prison, and they were comfortable in it, and nothing more was needed. No matter how many years one spends in prison, it is impossible to get used to it. Thoughts about freedom, like annoying flies, do not give rest to the human soul. After all, God created man free in all respects, and, moreover, He gave man freedom to choose own path on this earthly life. Unfortunately, most people choose a wider, more comfortable path for themselves, at the beginning of which there is mainly an idle life, but at the end of this path, as a rule, there is an aching, emptiness, regardless of whether you are in prison or not. The imprisonment itself, only doubles this emptiness inside a person, after which comes complete disappointment in everything, including life itself.

Of course, it is possible to due your time all the way, but not everyone can manage to preserve human dignity and remain a normal person. The prison breaks a person both morally and physically, especially if he does not know God and has not been reconciled with Him

through repentance. After all, you only have to get imprisoned only once; after, the prison accepts the person as her own, and the second, and the third, and... the fifth, and... the tenth time. Unfortunately, prison itself does not correct a person. It all depends on the person himself. No lengthy imprisonment, as well as the most stringent content regimes, affect people positively. Prison is not a place for entertainment. To count on the fact that it will harden you and make you stronger and more courageous is also complete nonsense. Honestly, it's better not to go to jail, and even better not to follow the path of wickedness and evil, where sooner or later you will surely stumble and fall. In the Holy Scripture it is said: «*The path of the righteous is like the light of radiance, which more and more brightens up to the full day. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they do not know what they stumble about*» (Prov. 4:18-19).

Today I really want to warn all those lucky enough to pass their punishment through probation centers. Friends, please do not tempt your fate. You will not have a second chance. Do not think that if you are lucky not to go to prison this time, that it will always be like this. No, it will not. It will be more challenging to fix your life next time. Do not look for fantasy where it has never been and never will be. Do not go on a broad path of unrighteousness and illusion, since at the end of this path you will surely encounter intolerable spiritual pain, emptiness and disappointment in everything. Today, more than ever, you all have a chance to radically change your life. Believe me, it's better to be free to realize and reconsider all the mistakes made in life than to get this epiphany in prison. I can affirmatively and with full responsibility tell you that a prison is not a place where you can learn something good. Believe me, today all of you have been given a sign from above, so that you can draw conclusions from the current situation. If you are given such an opportunity, then do not tempt God again.

To all of us, the Lord offers His way, by which man will always be under the protection of God. Once Jesus Christ in His Sermon on the Mount said: «*Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the path is wide, leading to destruction, and many go by them; because the gate is narrow and the way is narrow, leading to life, and few find it*» (Matt. 7:13-14).

The narrow path is the path of truth, following which we all become the heirs of eternal life. Today I urge everyone to go this way. As said, «*In the way of righteousness is life; in its path there is no death*» (Prov. 12:28).

I. GORIK.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

A new game encourages teenagers to study the Book of Revelation

Imagine being locked in a shed and having only 15 minutes to solve a series of puzzles that will lead you to the exit. This is the premise behind Escape Game i9teen, a game developed in Brazil that combines logical reasoning, teamwork, and biblical knowledge. And most interesting of all, it is based on the Bible Book of Revelation.

Escape Game i9teen, a game introduced in Brazil that is based on the Bible book of Revelation, combines logical reasoning, teamwork, and biblical knowledge. The game is prompting teenagers to go to the Bible in search of answers.

The game's launch took place in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, on September 22, 2018, and got teenagers involved in a plot about the end of time. In the game's play, participants go through ordeals in which they are persecuted for being Christians and end up trapped in a shed, where they need to solve puzzles to escape. If they don't make it out in time, they are tried and sentenced for their faith.

To get to the exit, players must find passwords, read Bible verses, and contextualize facts found in Revelation with the clues the game offers.

Approximately 300 teenagers participated in the activities. They were separated into groups of up to 10 participants and accompanied by instructors. All the activities took place inside three container-like wooden sheds.

With only five seconds left, Luiza Souza's team managed to escape. Getting in closer touch with the contents of Revelation, even in a playful way, awakened her to the importance of studying the biblical prophecies. «Here I felt very unprepared, so I want to study more to be ready for the events of the end», she said.

According to Fabiola Guedes, project creator and leader of Adolescent Ministries in the Southeast Brazilian church region, Escape Game i9teen seeks to combine entertainment with Bible study. His idea is to replicate it in other cities across the region.

«The book of Revelation is usually seen as mysterious, and we want to show that it is nothing like that», Guedes said. «It is a book that tells the story of our destiny, which is in heaven».

www.adventistreview.org

RESURRECTION TESTIMONY

People who deny the Resurrection of Christ find themselves in a paradoxical situation: they live in a world created by an event which, in their opinion, did not happen. In fact, you can choose to believe or not believe in Christ. But it is impossible to deny that we live in a world shaped by Christianity: our languages and cultures, architecture and music, the way we see the world and people, what we praise and blame, in short, everything we are carries the seal of Christianity. Even non-Christians, even violent anti-Christians breathe the air and speak the language which saturated with the Bible. Even the Bolshevik slogan «Who does not work, does not eat» was actually taken from Apostle Paul, and the famous statue «Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares», created in 1957 by the Soviet sculptor Vuchetich, refers to the words of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. For gifts, we say *thank you* and we call especially impudent lies *ungodly*. All of European culture; majestic cathedrals, Bach chorales, the images created by Andrey Rublev and Giotto, would not have happened if not for one event, the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Christianity and the entire Christian civilization would die without being born, if the body of the Crucified One was left to lie in the tomb.

Sometimes people try to compare Christ with other people who have influenced the world. But when we try to do this, not only is there a difference in scale, but also the difference in situations is astoundingly striking. Alexander of Macedonia undoubtedly changed the face of the world but he had a large battle-hardened army. He went from victory to victory and died surrounded by his comrades. Buddha with his teachings had a lot of influence on the development of entire regions and he was successful in creating a community that accepted his teachings and carried it further. Death also caught him among respectfully listening students. We can come up with other names but all these people have achieved success and by the time of their death laid a solid enough foundation to continue their works.

The gospel story, if we are to stop short of the resurrection, is a story of defeat, of complete and utter failure. Everyone turns away from Jesus: the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Romans and Herodians, the political elite and the crowd of the common people, and His disciples loose hope. Many hate Him and want to destroy Him.

Jesus died a death intended for the most despised and wicked criminals, a death so humiliating that it could not be given to a Roman citizen. One of the disciples sells Him for thirty pieces of silver, the other renounces Him three times, the rest leave Him and run. At the cross, only His mother remained along with some women and the apostle John.

The disciples are not at all enthusiastic — they are in fear and deep depression. This is understandable, for crucifixion can only mean one thing: they were cruelly mistaken. The Gospel itself conveys this atmosphere of confusion and despondency: *And we hoped that He was the One who should deliver Israel; but with all this, it is the third day now that this has happened (Luke 24:21)*. Moreover, even when the women told the disciples about the empty tomb and the angels heralding the resurrection, the disciples do not believe: *And their words seemed empty to them, and did not believe them (Luke 24:11)*.

The gospel in this respect is surprisingly tough: the pillars of the church, the apostles, are shown not from the most favorable side. Such a testimony can only be true and only emanating from the apostles themselves. All later Christian literature is naturally imbued with reverence for them, and no one in subsequent generations of Christians would dare to ascribe something like this to the apostles.

So, we see Jesus, executed by a cruel and dishonorable death, all the people unanimously turned away from him, his disciples run away. This is a picture of complete and total defeat which could be followed only by complete oblivion. The disciples would gradually withdraw from the shock and return to their previous occupations. In the eyes of the people, Jesus would remain just another failed applicant for the role of the Messiah — not the first and not the last.

Something happens that changes the whole picture. The confused and depressed disciples become fearless preachers of the Gospel. Those who hid in fear, afraid that they would be next, now themselves boldly come out to meet the persecutors with a proclamation: *Therefore, let the whole house of Israel firmly know that God has made this Lord Jesus Christ whom you crucified (Acts 2:36)*. They came out with a message; the shocking surprise of which after two thousand years, is still difficult for us to understand: the Man crucified on the cross is God's Messiah, Lord, Judge; He is the One in whom God gives eternal salvation to the Jews and the Gentiles, to the whole of mankind.

What could have changed these disciples so much? Just what they themselves said: Christ was resurrected, they saw Him alive, talked with Him, and they shared a meal. As the holy Apostle John says, *of what was from the beginning, what we heard, what we saw with our eyes, what we looked at and touched with our hands, about the Word of life — for life was manifested, and we saw and testify, and we announce to you this the eternal life that the Father had and appeared to us... (1 John 1:1-2)*.

To this day, we live among the evidence of this event. It is everywhere: in our language, culture, music, architecture, prose and poetry, wood and stone... So much says: «Christ is resurrected indeed!» — we just have to open our eyes to see it.

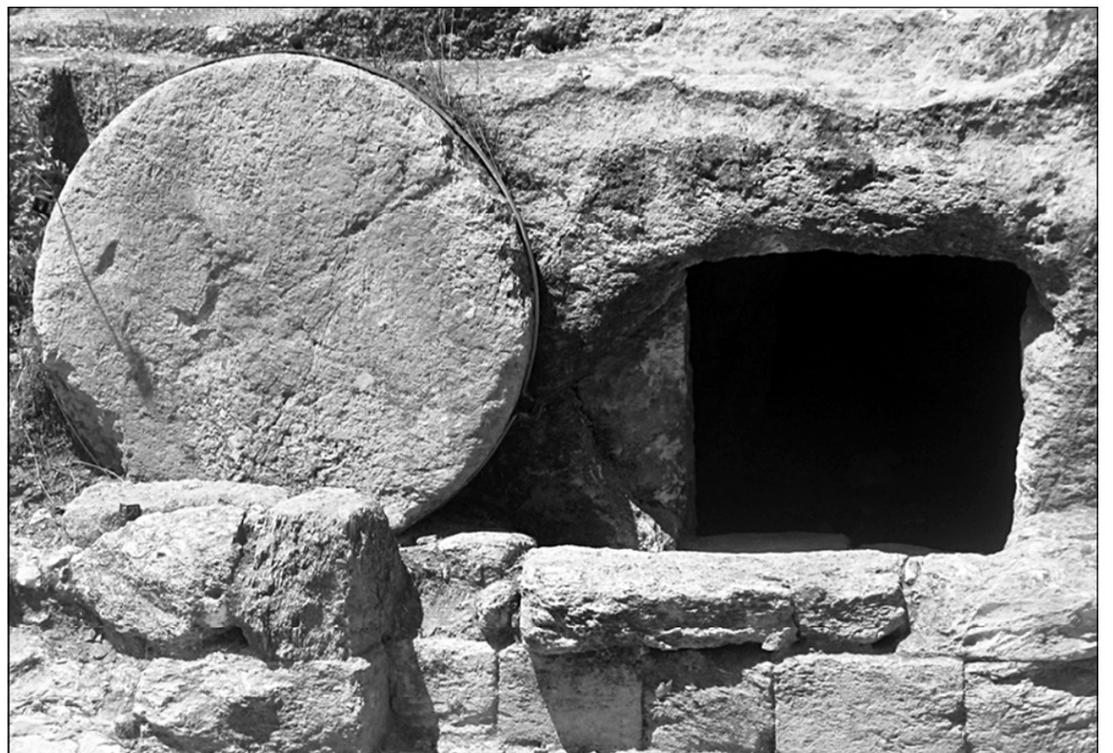
Sergey KHUDIEV, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru>

Is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ a hoax? Does one commit intellectual suicide by believing in the resurrection? Others may wonder, «What does it really matter? What difference does it make if Jesus did rise again?»

The resurrection does matter because life matters. If Jesus rose again from the dead, then we have assurance we can have life in heaven after this brief, troubled existence. The Apostle Paul, a chief persecutor of the church who turned into a great preacher for Christ testified about the resurrection. *Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures... after that he was seen of above one hundred brethren at once... then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also (1 Corinthians 15:3-7)*. The very truth of Scripture rests upon the resurrection of Christ. The salvation of all who believe relies upon it as well, for *If Christ be not raised... ye are yet in your sins (1 Corinthians 15:17)*.

Please consider three powerful proofs for Jesus' bodily resurrection:

THREE POWERFUL PROOFS FOR JESUS' BODILY RESURRECTION



JESUS' BODY WAS GONE AND THE TOMB EMPTY

After Jesus died, faithful disciples wrapped His body in grave clothes and placed it in a solid-rock tomb. The authorities rolled a two-ton stone into a slightly depressed groove to secure the tomb's entrance. Pilate, the Roman Governor, placed his seal upon the stone, securing Christ's body politically. If anyone dared break that seal, death would result. Finally, a well-trained unit of soldiers guarded the grave, securing His body in the tomb militarily.

What happened to His body? Did his enemies steal it? Surely, if the Roman or Jewish authorities stole the body they would have exposed it for all to see. Christianity would have soon died out. Instead, they resorted to silence regarding the body of Christ and threatened the apostles with violence if they continued to spread the message of Jesus' resurrection.

Did Jesus merely faint? Some say that Jesus did not actually die but the expert Roman executioners only thought he was dead. Are we to believe that without medical attention, weak, sickly, and hungry he broke free from the 100 pounds of grave clothes, rolled away the stone with his nail-pierced hands, frightened an entire unit of Roman soldiers into shaking dead men, walked miles on wounded feet and convinced his disciples he'd been raised from the dead? This one is harder to believe than the resurrection itself.

It is even more impossible to imagine one of the disciples removed the body. Neither Peter nor Thomas (remember their unbelief and doubts?) were ready to overpower the guards, unwrap the body, deliberately preach a lie that Jesus was alive, and then die for it.

These theories are not plausible. The guard was too powerful, the stone was too heavy and the disciples were too weak-willed to attempt such a deed. He is risen indeed!

THE MULTIPLE APPEARANCES OF THE RISEN CHRIST

For forty days after his death, Jesus showed he was alive by many *infallible proofs (Acts 1:3)*. The Scripture tells us of at least ten separate appearances of the risen Lord to various individuals and groups of people. Would anyone dare write these things in the Bible if Jesus remained buried in a grave?

This dispels the theory that Jesus' appearances were mere hallucinations. Witnesses included both women and men, many who were skeptical themselves until they were assured by the reality of Jesus' resurrection body. Thomas said, *Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails... I will not believe (John 20:25)*. When Jesus met Thomas' objections by showing his pierced hands and side, Thomas believed in and worshiped the risen Lord by saying,

My Lord and my God. Yes, He is risen indeed!

THE DISCIPLES' TRANSFORMED LIVES

After Jesus' arrest most of the disciples fled in fear. Peter denied three times that he was a follower of Jesus. After Jesus' death, they were even more despondent, disillusioned, and unbelieving. Something happened however to prove that Jesus was alive. After they each believed Jesus was physically alive from death, they all hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

After Jesus arose, their fear was transformed into faith; their doubt was transformed into dedication that led all the apostles (except Judas) to live faithful unto their death. Ten of the original apostles (all except John) eventually died a martyr's death.

At one time, I professed myself an atheist. I came to realize that attempts to explain away the authority of the Scripture and the evidence of the resurrection of Christ were vain. Surely, Christ is risen indeed, and He has changed my life and given me the great joy of knowing I will go to heaven someday and that I have hope today no matter what trial or difficulty I may face.

Jesus Himself said, *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:25-26)*. Believe in the risen Christ so you can be sure of everlasting life with Him!

Matt RECKER, pastor
of the New York Heritage Baptist Church,
www.proclaimanddefend.org

Every year, the closer we are to Easter the more I wonder why people say «Christ is risen!» only once a year. This exclamation is pronounced by many people, and not only believers, on Easter. An observer watching from the side could say that it's just a habit, a ritual to say, «Christ is risen!» and automatically respond with «He is risen indeed!» For most of the year people seem to forget that Christ has risen and then on Easter day one suddenly remembers that two thousand years ago the greatest event occurred. Well, it's good that unbelievers at least once a year, adhere to the traditions of the Christian society, by saying, «Christ is risen!»

However, it is difficult to understand why believers are the same way, just supporting traditions. All believers understand the «gospel» in translation from Greek means «good news» and that the main goal of this gospel message is to convey to all people the news that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead for the sake of our justification and salvation. As it is written, «*Who was delivered for our offenses,*

people. He said to them: «*Whosoever, therefore shall confess, me before men, him will I confess also, before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever, shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven*» (Matthew 10:32-33, KJV).

During the earthly life of Jesus Christ, disciples did not need to confess Him before people. This instruction was given by the Lord for the future, after His resurrection from the dead. We today actively recall the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead only on the day of Easter, and only on this day we solemnly exclaim that Christ has risen. But what about the other days? Why, throughout the year, we, believers, do not greet each other with the words «Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!» What prevents the whole Christian world from filling the space with this Good News every day?! It turns out that we hold in ourselves and don't share with others the main meaning of the whole Gospel, for some reason we are afraid to once again solemnly pronounce these powerful words: «Christ is risen!»

CHRIST IS RISEN!

and was raised again for our justification» (Romans 4:25, KJV).

The gospel that we have, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, all believers, are entrusted to carry into the world for the salvation of many lost souls. The Holy Scripture clearly states: «*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed*» (Romans 10:9-11, KJV).

In other words; we believers, are obliged to preach the good news about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to the whole world, and therefore exclaim not only once a year: «Christ is risen!»

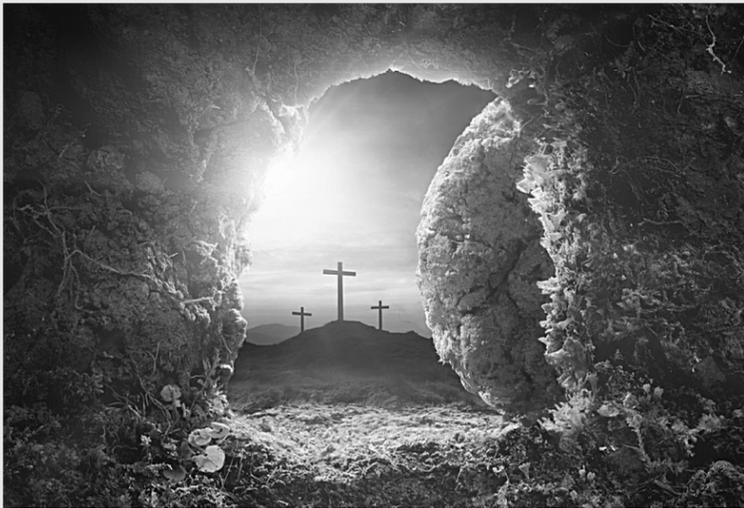
The exclamation «Christ is risen!» is a powerful weapon against the devil. The more we affirmatively say: «Christ is risen!», the farther we drive away the evil one, who is trying in every way to destroy us. Therefore, I believe that the gospel of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead should be spread throughout the earth daily. And an exclamation such as «Christ is risen!» should spread to those around us. The following verses from the Holy Scripture confirm that we live in a space of open information: «*Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath He set a tabernacle for the sun*» (Psalms 19:2-4, KJV).

The Lord Jesus Christ himself, after His resurrection from the dead, commanded: «*And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*» (Mark 16:15). Since Jesus left such a command for us, it means that such an exclamation as «Christ is risen!» must constantly come from our lips.

The whole essence and meaning of the Good News is to bring to the whole world that God the Father who loves all of us, sent His only begotten and sinless Son to the earth so that on the appointed day He would become a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. It is said that «*For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*» (2 Corinthians 5:21, KJV). The Gospel also says: «*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life*» (John 3:16).

In Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, God showed His greatness and power to all of us. Christ was resurrected for our justification and became the Intercessor before God the Father for each of us. The Epistle to the Romans says: «*Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*» (Romans 8:34, KJV). Apostle John in his epistle wrote: «*My children! I write this to you, lest you sin; and if anyone has sinned, then we have the petitioner before the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous...*» (1 John 2:1). And the Gospel of John adds: «*For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him*» (John 3:17).

Jesus Christ, being on earth, Himself personally asked His disciples to confess Him before other



I am sure that if the proclamation of the resurrected Jesus Christ becomes a daily tradition for the entire Christian world, then there will be little room for the evil one among God's children. There is not the slightest doubt that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. About His death and resurrection prophets prophesied four hundred years before His actual resurrection. This is what the prophet Isaiah says about this: «*Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, everyone, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked — But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors*» (Isaiah 53:1-12, NKJV).

Yes, Jesus Christ really bore the sins of many, and became the intercessor for all of us. Today, in my opinion, it is time for all of us to become the doers of His word, or, in other words, the doers of His instructions and commandments. No wonder we are clearly told: «*But be the doers of the word, and not the hearers only, deceiving your own selves*» (James 1:22).

Today I am glad that I can repeat these majestic and living words again and again: «Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!»

I. GORIK.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Did Elijah the prophet prophesy about John the Baptist?

I. OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY AND ITS FULFILLMENT

1. Malachi's prophecy

A. In the Book of Malachi there is a prophecy that prior to the Lord's coming, God's messenger will come into the world: **Malachi 3:1** — *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*

The word messenger is used in the Bible in relation to angels (spiritual beings) and towards God's prophets and ministers who are messengers of God in our world.

B. In the next chapter, the prophet Malachi names the name of this messenger of God. His name is Elijah: **Malachi 4:5** — *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.*

So we see a prophecy about the coming of Elijah before the coming of the Lord into the world. But as we read the New Testament, we read the words of Jesus Christ.

2. The stunning statement of Jesus Christ

Matthew 11:7-15 — *And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elijah, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

What do we see? Jesus Christ made a public statement that John the Baptist was promised by Elijah, the coming of which the prophet Malachi prophesied.

Later, Jesus said told His disciples the same thing about John the Baptist.

3. Jesus' conversation with His Disciples

Matthew 17:10-13 — *And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.*

From this conversation of Jesus with the disciples, it is clear that Jesus considers John the Baptist as Elijah, who came into the world and which none of the people recognized.

II. CONTRADICTORY STATEMENTS

How can one understand that John the Baptist was promised by Elijah? Was he the Old Testament prophet Elijah?

To answer this question, it is necessary to consider several passages.

1. John the Baptist's response

John 1:19-23 — *And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that Prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah.*

We see that John the Baptist spoke about himself that he is not Elijah.

2. Testimony of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration

Something interesting happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, which Jesus' three disciples, Peter, John, and James, witnessed. **Luke 9:28-36** — *And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elijah: Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with Him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah: not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear Him. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.*

It is interesting that the disciples saw the prophets Moses and Elijah alive, talking with Jesus Christ. What the disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration (they saw the living prophet Elijah there) testifies that John the Baptist was not Elijah. After all, Elijah all this time (from the moment the Lord took him from the earth) was with the Lord in heaven.

Then who was John the Baptist? After all, he was the forerunner of Jesus Christ, and it was about him that Isaiah and Malachi prophesied, calling him a messenger whom God would send to the world to prepare the way for the Lord.

3. What is the secret?

Speaking of John the Baptist, Jesus said: **Matthew 11:14-15** — *And if ye will receive it, this is Elijah, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* Pay attention to the phrase «Who has ears to hear, let him hear!» Jesus said it with a purpose. He who has ears should have heard and understood the following two things about John the Baptist and his mission on earth.

First, that John the Baptist was anointed with the same Spirit as the prophet Elijah. But it was not the spirit of Elijah, but the Spirit of God: **Luke 1:13-15** — *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*

So we see that John the Baptist was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah. In other words, he had to be anointed with the same Spirit as the prophet Elijah. And Elijah, being God's prophet, was anointed not by some other spirit, but by the Spirit of God, with which all the prophets of God were anointed: **Nehemiah 9:30a** — *Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testified against them by Thy Spirit in Thy prophets: yet would they not give ear...*

(Continued on the 9th page)

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

In the pursuit of «freedom» and a «comfortable» life I lost everything

My name is Valery. I was born and raised by an ordinary family in Kyiv. My parents worked a lot, and therefore I spent majority of my time on the street. Growing up, I started playing soccer. In order to remain in the sport, I had to make a choice: either I would take a special soccer class and would study hard, or I could live as I wanted.

I chose the latter for the sake of «freedom». The consequences of this choice manifested themselves very quickly. At the age of twelve, I was already known in the police station. I was fascinated by criminal life. I stole a lot, drank alcohol, and smoked. But I didn't stop there, I wanted new sensations and experiences, thus I brought drugs into my life. At first it was weed, a lot and for a long time, and then the first injection and quickly I became a slave to this addiction.

For about two years, I was seduced by sin in beautiful packaging: clubs, bars of different kinds, criminal romance... And then thefts and pure lies, this time to my loved ones...



For me, the dens, scandals, fights, diseases, and tears were the norm. As a result, I was disappointed in everything: in my choice, in my convictions and in life itself. I realized that I was deceived. In the pursuit of a beautiful life and «freedom» I have lost everything. During this time, I had buried many friends and acquaintances, as well as my elderly parents. I was completely broken, lonely and needed by no one. Two prison terms and half a wasted life was all I had. And instead of happiness it was a huge aching emptiness of the soul. I realized that this was all a dead end. I had nothing, and I do not need anything. There is no meaning in life, there is no goal, there is no joy, there is no peace.

That is exactly how God found me. I met with believers who told me about Christ and sent me for rehabilitation to a Christian rehab center. All my attempts that I took earlier to end the drug addiction only gave the illusion of freedom, because after some time I always returned to drugs. However, this time everything had changed.

The rehabilitation center was the happiest time in my life. God began to restore my shattered life. I saw that there was a completely different life, where people are truly happy and can enjoy life without drugs or alcohol. In the rehabilitation center I saw genuine love and the sincere desire of the guys to help me. I have new friends. And most importantly, there I met with Christ. This meeting has changed everything in my life. What I lived for and what I was striving for previously lost all value. God gave me new goals, new desires, and new feelings. This was the second birth! I read the Bible with delight, even though I did not like to read at all before. Prayer became a necessary part of my life. I am truly a happy man because of His mercy and love for me. He gave me a big family; a church. And gave me a beloved and loving wife and child. He restored my ruined health. I am sincerely grateful to God for everything!

Now my entire life and all my time belongs to God. I decided to devote my life to the same people I used to be. After rehabilitation, I realized that my vocation is to serve addicted people. We launched one rehabilitation center then another. The ministry has greatly expanded. For five years I was one of the leaders of the rehabilitation ministry near Kyiv, which included six rehabilitation centers. Through this ministry many people came to God, and it is especially valuable for me that among them are my friends with whom I grew up.

Also, God gave me the opportunity and desire to serve the people behind bars. Every summer we hold five-day summer camps in juvenile prisons. I myself was once that same teenager, deceived by the devil; I believed in ideas that make people miserable, unwanted, and cruel.

In 2013, my wife and I moved to Rivne to help in the ministry of founding a new church. Now there are two small churches and we also started a rehab ministry for substance abusers.

I am very grateful to God for the fact that He took a meaningless, hopeless person and adopted him and showed him His love. This is not my merit, but only the infinite, all-encompassing grace of God! Thank God for everything!

Valery PEDCHENKO, Ukraine.

I hit the streets early and by the age of ten or twelve I had already acquired «adult» habits: smoking, drinking, gateway drugs, and being acquainted with a jail cell. At fifteen I started using heroin. In those days (1998–1999) most of my village, the people who surrounded me, my peers, all used drugs. As a result, by the time I graduated I was constantly using drugs and I was stealing to pay for them.

I went to rehab for the first time at nineteen. I spent five months there and was

Mikhail KIRILLOV: «It seemed like God himself told me that

acquainted with faith in God but at that time I did not make any conclusions for myself because I considered myself still young. I wanted to live life to the max and therefore after returning from the center I returned to my old lifestyle of constant drug use.

After graduating I went to college but did not study. Instead I was fascinated by the Petersburg youth life, with its nightclubs and drugs.

At the age of twenty-one, I committed a crime for which I was incarcerated for five years. While I was serving my sentence, two of my believing friends corresponded with me and constantly reminded me of God. They wrote to me: «Misha! You know that Jesus Christ gives us the opportunity to free ourselves from our iniquities and find peace with the Creator!» Unfortunately, I had no interest in God at the time.

After my release in 2012 the same friends of mine suggested that I go to the rehabilitation center again, but I was not ready for it yet. As a result, I used drugs for a year and led a criminal lifestyle.

One night at my mom's house I was thinking about my life and I suddenly realized all its inadequacy. An image of a broken trough, which was my broken, failed life appeared before me. I was thinking about how this all happened. I remembered my childhood and the fact that as a child I never wanted to become what I became. I wanted to be good, to protect my sister and mother. I wanted to protect all people! But how did it happen that I became the one who brings only sorrow and misfortune to everyone and like a beaten animal hides from human eyes?

And I began to pray. I said: «Lord, I know that You are, and I know that You have given me life. But I turned my life into something terrible. I can no longer live such a life. Either You Lord change my life by taking the old one and giving a new one or I myself will end my life by committing suicide».

The next day I was going to fulfill my plan for ending my life and arranged an overdose in order to commit suicide. The people around me tried to talk me out of it. The last thing I remember before losing consciousness was the girl shouting: «Misha! Do not do that! God does not want you to die!» And I did not die then, they pumped my stomach in time.

When I was going through the program to get rid of addiction it was hard for me because even though I really wanted to start a new life, the old life did not want to let me go. I resisted, I did bad things. But once after one of

my actions during another meeting, suddenly the words spoken by the rehab leaders touched my heart: «Misha, in spite of everything, we love you». And these words suddenly overwhelmed me because I knew that there was not a single good deed in my life and absolutely nothing to love about me. At that moment it seemed to me that God Himself said that He loves me and wants to help me. From that point on I began a new life: I completed the rehabilitation program and the Lord began to change not

without paying even if the conductor forgot to come to me something in me seemed to say: «You have to pay», and I would get up and pay the conductor.

And these changes made me very happy because I know that it was not me who changed me so much but that it was God who transformed me from within.

I stopped lecturing everyone. Now I try to listen to everyone. I understand that all my brothers and sisters also had hard lives and they do not

only to my world, but He began to change me. I was surprised to observe the changes that God made in me! I seemed to be watching myself from the side.

Since I used to steal all the time, wherever I went my eyes immediately looked out for valuable things, whatever they were: handbags, telephones, watches, bicycles, things potentially suitable for theft. I had deceived people so often that I never let an opportunity for deception slip past me.

And now suddenly this was gone. I even had one funny incident where I bought something in the store, and I gave the saleswoman a hundred rubles (less than 5 dollars) and she mistakenly started counting my change as from a very large amount. As a result, she gives me an impressive amount and a thought arises in my head: in the past I would have taken this money without thinking

want to be taught morals. Though I am the youngest in the family I have always been a leader and always put my relatives in their place. And now I understand that all people need to be listened to. I did not like to listen to anyone before, especially if they started telling me about my difficulties. And now God gives me the understanding that people need friends and not those who constantly lecture but those who can just listen difficult times.

And yet before leaving to the center none of my friends or loved ones would talk to me. After rehab the Lord reconciled me with everyone and now, we have a wonderful relationship which relatives and I appreciate very much and try to preserve.

Also I used to have many enemies and now, after meeting God, there were miracles of



but now I cannot. I told the girl: «You are mistaken. I gave you a hundred rubles. You need to give me forty rubles of change, not four thousand (over 100 dollars), which you give me. «The girl of course was in shock for about five-seconds, then she apologized and then thanked me! One of the people who were behind me in line immediately made a joke: «Well, what are you, boy! You should have taken it!»

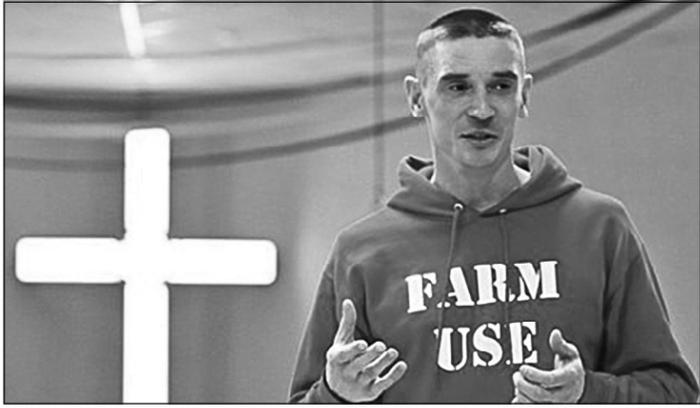
I also realized that I can no longer ride in public transport

reconciliation, when these people seeing me and talking about how I gained Christ, said: «Everything is alright, I forgave you long time ago and have nothing against you».

In December 2012, I was admitted to hospital with a diagnosis of «infiltrative tuberculosis of both lungs in a disintegration stage». After being a Christian for just eight months, I landed in the hospital.

(Continued on the 5th page)

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS



He loves me and wants to help»

(Ending. Beginning on the 4th page)

That's when miracles started happening. Every city and village get assigned to a hospital. Our city was assigned to the Vyborg tuberculosis hospital and this place was known for chaos. People there were turning the hospital into a den by drinking, smoking and using drugs. I really did not want to go there, because I understood how weak I was before temptation.

I was a member of a church in Tikhvin, there they had a different hospital which prohibits such lawlessness to occur. But I could not get there, because my residential city was assigned to Vyborg. When I went to my doctor before going to the hospital, I asked him if I had a chance to go to Tikhvin hospital. He said, «No», then asked: «Why would you want to go to Tikhvin?» I told him that I believed in Jesus Christ and with what is happening in the hospital in Vyborg, it would be very hard for me to be there. In Tikhvin is my church, brothers, who would be a great support during my illness. A miracle happened! The doctor called someone, told them that I had a church in Tikhvin, and even though at first, they didn't want to meet us, in the end they made an exception for me and admitted me into the Tikhvin hospital.

In the hospital, I began to undergo a two-month course of tuberculosis chemotherapy. At that time, it was very difficult for me in spiritual terms. I had a lot of questions and complaints inside, the essence of which was that no one understood how hard it was for me, and how did the Lord allow all this?

After completing the course of therapy, according to the results of the tests, it turned out that I got even worse. Everything was aggravated by the fact that I have, it turns out, multidrug resistance (MDR); my body does not accept the medicines that are given to me. The medications would not work for me. Even my regional attending physician gave disappointing news. He said that I would not leave the hospital anymore.

Suddenly I realized that when I die, I will go to heaven to God, and the people around me, dying, will go to hell! However, instead of thinking about it, I decided to pray for salvation for those around me, and never asked God to heal me. I prayed about my soul, asked God for forgiveness, and began to tell people in the hospital about God, about Jesus Christ. My brother and I gave the gospel to

every patient in each ward. Two more months passed, and again I get tested for tuberculosis, tests come out negative. With amazement, the doctors declare that I'm completely healed, that which was impossible with my diagnosis and in such a short time. I was discharged from the hospital with a diagnosis of «healthy».

When I was originally diagnosed with lung collapse, I was immediately given a second disability group. As a result of my miraculous healing, my disability was removed from me with the words, «You are completely healthy».

After the hospital, I got involved in children's ministry in the village of Shugozero. Later I became the youth leader at the same church.

One day my pastor, Vyacheslav Nikolayevich, told me about a certain team of people who traveled to Karelia for evangelism, and that this month he was invited to go with them, but he does not have the opportunity to go, and he's trying to figure out who to send instead of him. Hearing this, I asked: «Maybe send me?» I joined the team of evangelists and traveled to the Karelian city of Sortavala. When I returned from the trip, I realized that I had a desire to continue to go to Sortavala to preach the gospel to people, later I realized that I wanted to come to this city and live and serve the Lord there. In April 2013, I moved there. Four months later, I got married and my wife moved to join me in Sortavala.

Here, in Sortavala, we are primarily engaged in social service, that is, we are putting up ads, through personal contact, looking for people who need relief from addiction, and invite them to go through a program to get rid of dependence. We also tell people the gospel and invite them to Bible study meetings. We also try to communicate with local children and young people, including those from the local orphanage with whom we correspond, for joint meetings, games, and conversations aimed at preventing a sinful lifestyle by promoting a healthy lifestyle among them, identifying their needs and as far as possible trying to provide them with any assistance, ranging from helping them with school homework and ending with the provision of humanitarian aid.

In the summer we hold the Summer Playground for the residents of the city. This is my life now.

Mikhail KIRILLOV,
Russia,
<http://kirillov24.ru>

No Turning Back, the Past is Gone

I am forty-five years old. I was born in an ordinary, average family. We were never in need. My parents were decent people. Until fifth grade I grew up as a normal child, I was an excellent student, I played sports, teachers predicted a good future for me. In sixth grade, I tried hemp and felt happy. The desire to study was gone, and from a positive upbeat girl, I quickly turned into a negative one. My friends are the same as me, lovers of hemp. Smoking and drinking had become commonplace. As a result, in eighth grade I was politely asked to leave from school. At seventeen, I began to use drugs. For complete «happiness» hemp and wine was not enough. It seemed to me that at any moment I could stop and not be dependent on the drug. But what self-deception it was! At the age of twenty-one, I became pregnant and decided to give birth, even found the strength not to use drugs at this time. I gave birth to a beautiful healthy girl, but as soon as Christina grew a little, I immediately returned to my former life. The nightmare began a few months later, when I reached rock bottom. I realized that for «happiness» I will have to pay dearly.

Drugs are an expensive pleasure, for which I had to constantly steal. But the worst part was that I enjoyed doing it. Soon I went to prison for this. My father came to my aid, he took my daughter to live with him and got me out of prison. After a short period of time, I found myself behind bars again. This lifestyle suited me: drugs, theft, prison, free relations, and so on. At some point, my father did not have any funds to help, he had already sold his house and car. I dreamed of «happiness», but there was no desire to change anything either.

In 2010, I went to prison for the sixth time! I liked not living by the rules, so the prison did not change me. Once, Irina came into our cell, whom I knew was the best pickpocket of Simferopol. She was a completely different person. Seeing her, I became greatly interested in these changes. Irina told me that Jesus Christ had changed her life, that now she is happy and that my life can also acquire a new meaning. Intuitively, I felt that this is what I have always wanted. Through Irons, I heard the Gospel for the first time. She said that there are Christian rehab centers for people like me. Now I understand that even then God knocked on my heart through the personal testimony of human who, by my standards, was hopeless!

I began to attend church meetings of believers and saw that they were truly happy. I really wanted to understand what the cause of their joy was. I began to read the Bible but did not understand how to live it. Thanks to Valery Makhovik, the prison minister, who helped me to understand the Scripture at that moment.

A Dream That Changed My Life

Hello! My name is Aleksandr Lavrenyuk, I'm thirty-seven years old. I was born and raised in Kovel, Volyn Oblast. Our family was good, my childhood was not worse than others. At school, in elementary grades, I studied well, but after the sixth grade, didn't know how, I started drinking and smoking. Now I realize that this was due to the wrong environment, bad company. At that time, this immediately affected my studies.

Studying for me ceased to be interesting, so I only finished nine grades. After that I got enrolled in the school to get certified as a «gas and electric welder». For some time, having achieved a profession, I settled down and got a job, went abroad to work for relatives, but alcohol did not allow me to forget about myself, and everything began to get worse. Having good money and no responsibility in my life, I began to go into binges more and more often. Accordingly, I could not go to work in such a state, but I was drawn to alcohol, so this led me to theft. I stopped stealing in 2004 when I was arrested for theft and given a term sentence of five years. In prison, everything became even worse. There I tried drugs and after that I could not refuse the pleasure of accepting them at every opportunity.

In 2009, when I came out of prison, I could not get a normal job and therefore I worked on construction sites (builders are usually addicted to vodka). There was always not enough money so history repeated itself. I returned to theft, and in 2014, I was sentenced to three and a half years in prison. In 2017, when I was free, I found out that my father who supported me and was the only person I knew

Understanding came that I lived with a made-up «happiness», which has nothing in common with the happiness of the present. I asked God to change my life.

When I was released, I immediately went to a rehabilitation center. I knew that I would go through a rehabilitation course, no matter what it cost me. In the center, I finally became closely acquainted with the greatest Being, about whom Irina, Valery and other believers talked to me about, with Jesus Christ! I had



time to weigh everything, rethink and make the right decisions. I really liked the new life that He gave me. Right now, I have just started to live and do not intend to return to the past. I made a covenant with the Lord through water baptism, learned how to rejoice at each new day, and realized that God always wanted to make me happy. I have developed a close relationship with my daughter and grandson. There were real friends and new goals in life. Last year, God gave me a relationship with a beautiful person, and soon Sergey and I will get married. Today I know that I am truly happy and this happiness will never leave me.

Natalya MAROCHKINA, Ukraine,
<http://revival.kiev.ua>

P. S. From the rehabilitation team: Since 2013, Natalya is the leader of the rehabilitation center for women. Together with the team, she visits the prisons and tells the inmates that God can change their lives. This year, Natalya entered the biblical institution of spiritual counseling in order to better help those who live in self-deception. The Lord entrusted the inmate with six convictions an opportunity to take part in the lives of other people in-dependency.



and loved had died. After that, I went all the way out into all grave sins. Also, almost at the same time, one of my childhood friends, Nadia, died, whose funeral I attended. I was very shaken and pondered about how scary it was to die at such a young age. A few days after her funeral, I had a dream that changed my life.

I dreamed that I was walking along a street I knew, and Nadia came out to meet me outside. At first I was scared and told her that she died, to which she replied, «Only my body died. Do not worry, it's me». She invited me to go with her. We went to all of the familiar places from our past, and at some point, a voice sounded and commanded that everyone gather. We went to the square where people gathered in rows; in an instant three columns rose and large

creatures appeared in front of us who opened wells in the ground and threw people there, no one could escape from there. When Nadia and I came in line, I saw Nadia being thrown into a well with sulfur, dipped several times, and then pulled out. At that moment, the creature looked at me, and as if with a strong hand, I was thrown out of the viewing window, in which there were holes, and a voice said: «You do not belong here». At that moment, Nadia began to get pushed into another well, and she shouted to me: «Tell my family to ask God for forgiveness!» And she was gone. I started to run away from there, looked up and saw that my father was looking at me from a cloud. He told me to stop, or otherwise I would be in the same place as my friend, then I woke up.

I told my mother about this dream, and she told me something that I hadn't known before. My father, who was an atheist all his life, repented three days before his death. A man in charge of checking electricity in apartments, came, and learning that my father had cancer, offered to pray and lead my father to repentance. My dream left me very shaken, and I accepted it as a reality. My mother at that time was already like a believer for seven years, she herself served in a coffee house. She immediately realized that God was knocking on my heart. I, as never before, was ready to open the door to my heart for Him. She invited me to go to a rehabilitation center, and I agreed.

When I got to the rehabilitation center in Vinnytsia, I really felt how God gives freedom, peace and joy. I am grateful to the Lord that I came to this place and that there are such people, with sacrificial and loving hearts, whom God blessed me with.

Aleksandr LAVRENYUK, Ukraine,
<http://rankova-zirka.com>

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

I realized the brunt of my crimes and repented



I grew up in a simple family, in Kirovograd. My father was a miner, and mother worked in sales majority of her life. For as long as I can remember, my father always drank vodka and «raised» my sister, mother and myself.

Due to my home environment I spent majority of time on the street. The only thing that my father required of me was to tell the truth. Therefore, I was a skilled cheater, I made up different stories on the move and was persistent in my lies. Even when my father started hitting me for a lie, I still stood my ground.

I did not know what to do so that they would not beat me, so I decided to become physically strong. At the age of fifteen I started boxing, and after six months I was not beaten, but I beat everyone. I remember how my friends and peers loved to count their trips to girls, and I, unlike them, loved to count my fights. I counted more than two hundred bloody fights. Three years later, when I appeared at clubs, in cafes, and other crowded places, I ruined the mood of many. Then Kirovograd gangsters noticed me and suggested that I engage in racketeering with them. Therefore, when one day I landed into prison, I was not even surprised.

In prison, I tried to adhere to all the «rules». But then something happened to me. After I watched the film «Les Miserables» with other prisoners, all my pomposity suddenly disappeared, that's when I decided to go to a Christian service. When I got there, I did not understand what I was doing there — a well-groomed, proud man among the poor and the needy.

Later, after a while, I realized that God then showed me who my real brothers are and who are just brothers, who are just waiting for you in the barrack, because you have a sausage or a drug.

I began to read the Bible, although I did not understand what kind of book it was. My only rule during the Biblical reading was not to smoke over the Bible.

The first book I have ever read was called «Genghis Khan» by V. Yang. The author

vividly and colorfully described the fruits and sweets on the eastern tables, the colorful tents, the soldier's clothing imprinting vivid illustrations in my mind. Therefore, when I read the Bible, I was as if among all these historical events. I was upset with Joseph, when his brothers betrayed him, and so on.

Shortly after I found myself back in prison for another violation. Shut in, reading the Bible. When I reached **Isaiah 1:5**, where it is written: «*Why should ye be stricken anymore? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment*». I suddenly had a change of heart and thought of my brothers: one had problems with his legs because of drugs, the other was beaten by the staff of the institution, and only I was healthy. Then I realized that I can't wait any longer: I need to repent. Unwittingly realized the brunt of my crimes. After that, I repented before God for all my sins for the first time.

The next morning I decided to follow Christ. It is difficult for me to pinpoint my moment of rebirth. After my prayer of repentance and even after baptism, I still sinned a lot, but at the same time I clearly understood one thing: I don't want to live as I did before.

When I was released, I went to my hometown. Upon arrival, I visited the central church and asked for help from the pastors. They offered me two options: to go to rehabilitation in Rivne or in Makarov. I did not care where I would go. They decided to send me to Makarov since I asked for help. The center gave permission, so soon I was at the center for rehabilitation.

One day, at the center, I realized that I had to give myself completely to Jesus. So,



I prayed the following prayer: «Lord, my life is a clean sheet. I put a signature on it, and you write Your plan. What you write, that I will do, and I will live». After this decision, I realized that I was forgiven.

After going through rehab, I got married. God sent me a wife who strongly supports me; she is a woman of great faith. God is slowly changing me.

I thank God for His long-suffering and mercy towards me!

Aleksandr STETS, Ukraine,
<http://revival.kiev.ua>



started leaving me. There came a period when I did not care about life and what to poke myself with. I lived in brothels, where I was sometimes beaten, but nothing could stop me. I drank alcohol, ate pills, injected drugs — in general, I did everything in order not to see my real state. I was a little more than twenty years old, but I simply did not have hope for a normal life.

I never considered myself a criminal. In my eyes, I was a victim of circumstances.

When I met believers, who told me about repentance and about God loving me, I laughed. I did not believe that someone could love me and did not understand that I was at fault.

Once a friend of mine went to a rehabilitation center. Of course, I was very skeptical of this venture, and laughed at him. He did not return for a long time, and then he began to call me and tell me that he no longer uses drugs, that he moved to another city, he works, and everything is fine with

No Looking Back

My parents were criminals and more than once were in prison. Naturally, my childhood was spent in an atmosphere of conversations and memories of their «exploits». It was a bedtime story for me. I listened very attentively to these adult conversations, soon an inappropriate perception of the world and behavior formed in my heart. I already knew for sure that it was impossible to be honest, trusting, decent, because people would simply crush you. I understood that you can survive only with the help of cunning, resourcefulness and lies.

I lost my parents early. Dad died when I was four years old. After the death of my father, my mother became acquainted

with a man who beat me, my sister, and brother very badly. After some time, they reached rock bottom, digging through dumpsters, so we grew up on the streets, having to get for ourselves. I was very ashamed of my parents, but the worst thing was that people around me treated me like a nobody, like an alcoholic's daughter. Most of all, I did not want to become like my mother.

After mom died, drugs entered my

life. I met a guy who got me addicted. I trusted this man, but later I realized that I was needed only for money and sex. We quickly broke up. At first, I thought that I could control my addiction. Of course, it was self-deception. From that moment on, my whole life was devoted to searching for drugs.

At first it was very simple: drugs were my treatment. There was a crazy time when drugs were easily accessible and cheap. Then everything changed and I fell lower and lower, slowly my friends

him. Of course, he constantly told me to go to the rehabilitation center, and I told him that it was not for me. I'm smart and will not allow at anyone to deceive me.

One day, someone beat me up and threw me out onto the rainy street for a dose of drugs which I did not have. That's when I realized that I had become even worse than my mother. This was my turning point, I had already reached rock bottom, there was nowhere else to go. I remember that I knelt and began to cry about my lost life. Of all the gods I've heard, I remembered Jesus Christ. I sincerely asked Him for help: so that He would take my worthless life or change something in it.

When my friend called again and suggested that I go to a rehabilitation center, I agreed in order to somehow stop the madness in which I lived. There was nothing to lose.

When I came to Makarov for rehabilitation, I saw people who were once the same as me, but completely different. In time, I realized that the very Christ whom I had recently prayed to changed them. I began to change internally, I began to soften. Then the moment came when I realized that I would never go back to my former life.

Of course, it was difficult to start life anew. I did not know how to work, I couldn't just be sober. I had health problems. But my new friends helped me a lot; they were believers for many years and knew how to overcome difficulties and how to support others. I am very grateful to them. I learned to live differently, like a normal human being.

It's been more than seven years since I got admitted into the rehabilitation center. At that time, I just wanted to get rid of addiction, but got a lot more. I have a wonderful husband now. I teach Sunday School, and most importantly, I am helping others find a way out in the circumstances in which I once was.

I know for sure that the very Jesus Christ whom I once prayed to in the rain changed my life.

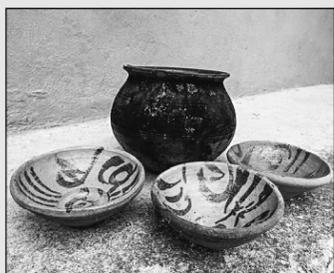
Julia STETS, Ukraine,
<http://revival.kiev.ua>

Let's fight

Two elderly males living in the same cell, never argued or had a quarrel. Seeing this, one said to the other, «Let's fight at least once, as all normal people quarrel».

The other replied, «I do not even know how a quarrel may arise».

The first said, «Here I will put a jar among us and say, «It is mine», and you



say, «No, it is not yours, but mine». From this a dispute will be born, and from a dispute, a quarrel.

After discussing, they set a jar down between them. One old man said, «The jar is mine».

The other one to him, «And I believe that it is mine».

The first one said again, «Not yours, it's mine».

Then the second man replied, «If it is yours, then take it».

The quarrel was not achieved.

Two plows

Two plows got repaired in the forge. They looked the same. One of them remained standing in the corner of the barn. Her life was easier than the life of the another plow which the farmer loaded onto a cart the next morning and brought to the field. There she became beautiful and brilliant. When both plows met again in the



barn, they looked at each other in surprise. The unused plow, was covered with rust. With envy, she looked at her brilliant friend, «Tell me how you be-

came so beautiful? It was so nice for me to stand in my corner in the silence of the barn».

«Idleness has crippled you, and I became beautiful from work», the second plow responded.

<https://pritchi.ru>

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MERCY

INTRODUCTION

DEFINITIONS

1. **Explanatory dictionary of the Russian language**, edited by D. N. Ushakov: Mercy — the willingness out of compassion to assist those who need it.

2. **Dictionary of Social Sciences**: Mercy — active compassion; compassion in action.

3. **Encyclopedia Circumference**: Mercy — compassionate, benevolent, caring, loving attitude towards another person.

4. **Synonyms**: mercy, compassion, pity, sympathy, condescension, kindness.

5. **Mercy** — a merciful heart or a heart filled with mercy.

6. **Antonym of mercy** — cruelty.

I. WHAT THE OLD TESTAMENT SAYS ABOUT THE MERCY OF GOD

The Holy Scripture multiple times testifies that the Lord is the God of mercy and the Father of mercy. Let's turn to these testimonies:

1. The Testimony of God Himself

Exodus 22:26-27 — *If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.*

Exodus 34:6 — *And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.*

2. The Testimony of God's Law on God's Mercy

Deuteronomy 4:31 — *For the LORD thy God is a merciful God; he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them.*

2 Chronicles 30:9 — *For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.*

3. The Testimony of King David on God's mercy

When King David violated God's command on the census and counted the people of Israel, the Lord God gave him a choice on what punishment he wants to take for his disobedience. And David, knowing the mercy of God, decided that it was better to fall into the hands of a merciful God than into the hands of cruel people. And he was not mistaken: **2 Samuel 24:11-18** — *For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man. So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the*

people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing place of Araunah the Jebusite. And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house. And



Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

David also left a testimony of God's mercy in his psalms: **Psalm 86:4-5** — *Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee; Psalm 116:5 — Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.*

4. The Testimony of the prophet Jeremiah of God's mercy **Lamentations 3:22** — *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*

5. The Testimony of the prophet Daniel about God's mercy **Daniel 9:18** — *O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.*

6. Historical Testimony of the nation of Israel regarding God's mercy

☉ The great mercy of God was demonstrated in that He saved the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery and for forty years, while living in the desert, He fed His people and protected them from heat and cold (**Book of Exodus**).

☉ The great mercy of God was repeatedly manifested in the way the Lord defended His people from enemies. A striking example of God's mercy is in the story described in the **Book of Esther**.

☉ The great mercy of God was manifested in the way the Lord protected His people from diseases and epidemics by providing them with His Law, telling people about the rules of personal hygiene in the hot climate of Palestine (**Book of Leviticus**).

☉ Not once but many times the Israel nation broke his covenant

with God, for which the Lord punished His chosen people by sending diseases, pestilence and pagans onto them, and allowing the capture and murder of the Jews. Nevertheless, the Lord always showed mercy to those who turned from evil deeds and returned to the bosom of God, as written in **Psalm 103:8-13** — *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high*

illustrates God's mercy, drawing a parallel between our Heavenly Father and the father of the prodigal son. The following talks about that mercy: **Luke 15:20** — *And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

C. The Parable of the Unmerciful Slave (**Matthew 18:23-35**). This parable is an illustration of how the Lord God will deal with those who having received mercy and forgiveness from God did not want to show mercy towards their

neighbor. This is what the parable says: **Matthew 18:35** — *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.*

2. The acts of mercy that Jesus Christ performed

The Lord Jesus Christ not only taught about charity, but also showed a personal example of charity towards his neighbor. Therefore, the acts of Jesus Christ can be called the ministry of mercy.

☉ Driven by mercy Jesus healed the sick: **Matthew 14:14** — *And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.*

☉ Driven by mercy Jesus gave sight to the blind: **Matthew 20:29-34** — *And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.*

1. The Teaching of Jesus Christ on Mercy

The New Testament shows that Jesus taught the people out of mercy: **Mark 6:34** — *And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.*

What did Jesus teach them? One of the teachings taught to us by Jesus Christ is the doctrine of mercy, imprinted in His parables.

A. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:29-37**). This parable is about human cruelty and mercy. The following was said about the mercy of the Samaritan: **Luke 10:33** — *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him...*

B. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:1-11**). This parable

☉ Driven by mercy Jesus healed those who were possessed: **Mark 9:20-27** — *And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oft times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

☉ Driven by mercy Jesus resurrected the dead: **Luke 7:12-15** — *Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.*

☉ Driven by mercy Jesus fed 4000 people (not counting women and children): **Matthew 15:32-38** — *Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.*

3. The peak of God's mercy

Not only the life of Jesus Christ, but His death is an example of God's mercy towards man. Through His death on the cross for the sins of the whole world, God showed mercy to the perishing mankind: **John 3:16** — *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life; 1 John 4:10* — *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

III. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE MERCY OF MAN

The Bible clearly states about the sinful nature of man: *...all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God... (Romans 3:23)*. Sin have made man cruel, indifferent, and incapable of mercy. This is what the Old Testament says about it: **Hosea 4:1** — *Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land; Micah 7:2* — *The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.*

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Nevertheless, the Lord calls us to be merciful: **Micah 6:8** — *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

Then how can a man defeated by sin become merciful? The answer is not so complicated. Since the Lord God is the Father of mercy (2 **Corinthians 1:3**), He is the source of mercy. And man's mercy is built on God's mercy.

1. God's mercy is the basis of our mercy

☉ **Mercy is a sign of wisdom descending from above:** **James 3:17** — *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good*

re is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works; **1 Peter 1:22-23** — *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

3. The Word of God calls us to be merciful

1 Peter 3:8-9 — *Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.*

as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

Thirdly, the Lord will not leave those without reward who are merciful to the neighbor: **Matthew 5:7** — *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy;* **Proverbs 11:17** — *The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh;* **Proverbs 14:21** — *He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he;* **Proverbs 16:6** — *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil;* **Proverbs 22:9** — *He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.*

At the same time, the Lord will not leave those unpunished who, in response to God's mercy, refuse to show mercy to their neigh-

PASTOR'S WORD

WISDOM OF SOLOMON

The Bible tells us the story of the wisest man who once lived on earth, King Solomon. At the very beginning of his reign, the Lord appeared to him and tells him: «Ask what to give to you». Solomon asked for wisdom and God so pleased with that gave Solomon not only wisdom, but wealth and great glory.

This is how the story is written in the Bible: *In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing* (**1 Kings 3:5-10**).

And this is how God answered to Solomon's request: *...Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days* (**1 Kings 3:12-14**).

Making the right choice in our life is very important. Are our decisions in everyday life less important? Sometimes a series of decisions made on minor issues can change the course of a person's entire life. Something similar happened with Solomon.

The beginning of Solomon's life

☉ **Solomon is chosen by God**

Having grown old, David says: *...And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel* (**1 Chronicles 28:5**).

It turns out that of all the sons of David, God chooses Solomon to be the next king over Israel, revealing His will to King David.

☉ **Solomon was wise**

By the time Solomon was placed in the kingdom, he was a fully grown-up man and already possessed wisdom, which is clear from David's testament to Solomon: *...Do therefore according to thy wisdom* (**1 Kings 2:6**); *Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him...* (**1 Kings 2:9**).

☉ **Solomon was modest**

Solomon tells God about himself: *...And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?* (**1 Kings 3:7-9**).

To talk like this about yourself shows the modesty in a person who does not have a high opinion of himself.

Having tested Solomon, the Lord approves of his choice and endows him with special wisdom and wealth, and promises to prolong the days of his life if he walks according to His ways.

(Continued on the 10th page)



Drawing by Igor OSOKIN, Russia

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MERCY

fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

☉ **Mercy is a sign of true love (agape):** **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** — *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

☉ **Mercy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit:** **Galatians 5:22-23** — *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

Mercy is the trait of God's character. Man himself does not have this quality and is not able to manifest this quality in his behavior. But this becomes possible if the Spirit of God lives in man. But for this to happen, each of us must be born again.

The conclusion for all of the above states that mercy in a person is the evidence of his or her close relationship with God. Without the relationship with God, one is unable to show mercy and love to his neighbor.

2. God's Word calls us to be born again

We are not born merciful, but we can become such if we allow the Lord God to accomplish in us the work of transforming our character. Therefore, the Word of God calls us to the following:

A. First, to be born again: **John 3:3, 5-8** — *...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

B. Secondly, to daily change through the renewal of your mind: **Romans 12:2** — *...And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

C. Thirdly, it must be remembered that both to be born again and the transformation of the mind are possible only under the influence of God's Word: **2 Timothy 3:16-17** — *All scriptu-*

A. What it means to be merciful

The concept of mercy includes the ability to show pity, compassion, sympathy for one's neighbor in his needs and problems. On the other hand, the ability and want to forgive the offender.

It is no coincidence that the Lord calls us to love our neighbor and be sensitive to his problems (**1 John 3:16-18** — *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth*), and find the power to forgive his offenders. Here are just a few passages from the teachings of Jesus Christ on this topic: **Matthew 6:15** — *But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses;* **Matthew 18:35** — *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

Some believe that forgiveness must be earned and deserved. But no, forgiveness is always given for free, and if forgiveness is to be deserved, then it is no longer forgiveness. None of us would ever be able to earn the forgiveness of God. Therefore, the Lord God gave His forgiveness free of charge. Similarly, it is impossible to earn mercy, therefore, it can only be given and received for free.

Someone formulated the meaning of mercy very well by saying that the true mercy is the distribution of grace that we received from God onto others.

B. Memo. What you need to remember about mercy

First, the obligation to be merciful is based on the example of mercy of our Heavenly Father. Being His children, we must act in the manner of the Father: **Luke 6:36** — *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*

Secondly, our mercy towards neighbors should be the result of God's mercy manifested towards us: **Colossians 3:12-13** — *Put on therefore merciful, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even*

bor: James 2:13 — *For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

Another proof of this truth is written in the passage from **Matthew 25:31-46**: *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

Therefore, let us be merciful as our Heavenly Father is merciful, so that we would not be painfully ashamed before Him on judgment day for not showing mercy to our neighbor when he needed it!

The material for the newspaper «Prisoner» kindly provided by the Bible Discussion Club, Montreal, Canada <http://cogmtl.net/Articles/137.htm>

Did Elijah the prophet prophesy about John the Baptist?

(Ending. Beginning on the 3rd page)

Secondly, John the Baptist had the same mission as the prophet Esaias — to prepare the hearts of people for the coming of the Lord: **Luke 1:16-17** — ...*And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.*

And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Esaias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

John the Baptist preached the need for repentance as the prophet Esaias. A person is not ready to open his heart to the Lord and let Christ in his heart without repentance. John the Baptist called the people to turn from their sinful life to the Lord and confess their sins to Him: **Matthew 3:1-3** — *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight;* **Luke 3:10-14** — *And the people asked him, saying, what shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, and what shall we do? And he said unto them, do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.*

Esaias did the same thing in his time: 1 Kings 18:21 — *And Esaias came unto all the people, and said, how long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.*

So, we found out that John the Baptist was not the prophet Esaias. However, his life was the fulfillment of the prophecy described in the Book of Malachi. It was John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, who through the preaching of repentance prepared the hearts of people for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist accomplished this mission by being anointed with the same God's Spirit and power of God as the prophet Esaias.

III. HOW IS EVERYTHING SAID ABOVE RELATED TO US TODAY?

After we have figured out the answer to the question about the spirit and power of Esaias, let me ask if what we have just learned has anything to do with us? And if so, how it relates to us?

As Christians, we are under the guidance of the same Spirit, with which both the prophet Esaias and John the Baptist were anointed — the Holy Spirit of God: **Romans 8:14** — *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;* **1 John 2:20** — *But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.* We are Christians anointed with the Holy Spirit as God's prophets. And this imposes on us a certain responsibility and obligations in front of God.

What are these obligations? As Christians and anointed by God, we are called to the same ministry as the prophet Esaias and John the Baptist. As other prophets of God and men of faith, we are called by God to call people to repentance: **Acts 2:38** — *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

We live as the bible calls «the last time». The end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ are coming. Our mission is to tell people about Jesus Christ so that they prepare for the coming of the Lord and that this day does not take them by surprise.

Do you carry out this mission?

Is Jesus living among us? If so, where and what is his nationality?

Who is Jesus Christ? This is the great almighty God, the Creator of all visible and invisible, who came to the world in the flesh: **1 Timothy 3:16** — *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.* Knowing who Jesus Christ is, we will answer the question of whether He lives among us. **1 Kings 8:27** — *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? And yet the Lord lives among the people. The Lord lives among us, but not as a man. According to the Bible prophecy, He*

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



came down to earth to live in everyone who, by faith, accepted Him as his God and Savior on the day of Pentecost almost 2000 years ago.

This is what the Bible says:

☉ Jesus gives the promise of His return in the form of the Spirit: **John 14:15-20** — *If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*

☉ Jesus warned the disciples of the imminent fulfillment of the promise: **Acts 1:4-8** — *And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both*



Drawing by Igor OSOKIN, Russia

in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

☉ The fulfillment of the promise on the day of Pentecost: **Acts 2:1-4** — *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

☉ **Romans 8:9** — *But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* Jesus Christ will live among the people in the form of the Spirit until the second coming of Christ. Today, there are false teachers who pretend to be Jesus Christ, who returned to earth in many nations. For example, there are forty false Christs in Seoul (South Korea). But the Lord Jesus warned that at the end of the world many false Christs will appear: **Matthew 24:23-24** — *Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible,*

they shall deceive the very elect. Some false prophets teach that Jesus has already come to earth secretly and lives among the people. However, this is a lie because Jesus Christ Himself told the people what His Second Coming would be through the Bible. It will not be secret or hidden. Everyone will know about it in one moment: **Matthew 24:26-27** — *Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* Therefore, Jesus Christ lives among people and within each believer who accepts Him as his God and Savior. And the Spirit, as we know, has neither flesh, nor bones (**Luke 24:39**), nor, therefore, nationality. When Jesus lived on earth in the flesh, we know perfectly well that He was Jewish by nationality.

Terribly afraid of death

Why are you afraid of death? Is it because you do not know what awaits you after death? God did not leave us in ignorance. The Lord in His Word spoke about the reality that awaits a person beyond death because He wanted each of us to know what awaits us after death. Heaven or hell waits a person after the death and each person decides during his or her life where he or she will spend eternity. True Christians, those who are reconciled to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, are not afraid of death. The Apostle Paul said that death is an acquisition for him: **Philippians 1:21** — *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

Why is death a gain for a Christian? It is because Christians (disciples and followers of Jesus Christ) will meet with their Father after death: **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** — *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. Also, it is written in Revelation 14:13 — ...Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth...*

If you truly dedicate your heart and life to Jesus Christ, the Lord will give you peace and you will no longer fear death: **Philippians 4:6-7** — *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

Do we choose spouses or does God do this for us?

First of all, you should understand that you will have to live with this person, not God. Therefore, it is you who choose your spouse and that you are responsible for your choice. God only gives us certain advice when choosing spouses.

☉ The Lord warn believers bonding their lives with unbelievers in His Word (**2 Corinthians 6:14-18** — *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty).*

☉ The husband should be the head of the wife (**Ephesians 5:23** — *...the husband is the head of the wife;* **1 Corinthians 11:3** — *But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God).*

☉ The spouses should not divorce (**1 Corinthians 7:10** — *And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband;* **1 Corinthians 7:39** — *The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord), and so on.*

How to choose a spouse? It is necessary to marry not the one with whom you can live, but the one without whom you cannot live. It is the will of the Lord that every man be happy in marriage, choosing a spouse for himself without whom he or she would not think of their existence and with whom they could faithfully serve God and grow in faith, love and holiness.

<http://cogmtl.net/q.htm>

The right decision

A man came to confess. The wait to see the priest is two hours or more. The place is crowded and stuffy...

— Should I leave or what? — flashed sly thought.

But the other thought said: — The wait time is two hours here and there is Eternity. If you

do not remove the burden of your sins, such crowd and total darkness cannot compare with inconveniences here. You can choose! The man made a choice. After he confessed, the same thought asked:

— Are you feeling well now?

— Better than ever! — Happily answered the man.

— Well done! — said thought. — There you will feel that you cannot even dream and also forever!

* * * * *

Hanger

A theatrical coat hanger envied everyone: the general's overcoat, the gorgeous fur coat of a beautiful

woman and even the thin jacket of a student.

— All of them are in business, all are needed and I am the only one so worthless! — She sighed and hid from shame in the very corner of the wardrobe.

What immediately began here! General holds out overcoat, but where to hang it? The beautiful woman took off

her fur coat and now what? — A whole mountain of clothes accumulated in less than a minute. Suddenly there was a cry from the student:

— Here she is! It is found!

The hanger was very happy when she heard the joyful «And what would we do without you?»

<https://pritchi.ru>

PASTOR'S WORD

WISDOM OF SOLOMON

(Ending. Beginning on the 8th page)

What better can you wish for? Because Solomon was humble and wise, God ordained him king of God's nation — Israel.

The Continuation of Life

The beginning of the humble and wise king, who made a choice in God's favor by asking God for wisdom is noteworthy. However, if we follow King Solomon's life, we see that his ending was sorrowful. *The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice... (1 Kings 11:9).*

What brought the wisest man who ever lived on our planet to such a shameful end?

David, Solomon's dad, said, *...and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go... (1 Kings 2:3).*

God also appeared before Solomon twice and told him, *And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life (1 Kings 3:14).*

There was no way that Solomon did not know what the law said in regards to the selection of king and the rules that the king had to know and follow.

Let us look at some of these rules written in **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**:

- ☉ *for the king not to acquire great numbers of horses for himself,*
- ☉ *for the king not have many wives, or his heart will be led astray,*
- ☉ *for the king not to accumulate large amounts of silver and gold,*
- ☉ *the king must write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law... and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees... so that he would not true from the law to the right or to the left (18-20).*

The biblical account on the life of Solomon is straightforward that Solomon went down the path of consistent violations of the listed laws of Moses.

☉ Acquiring great numbers of horses

Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses (1 Kings 4:26).

Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from all other countries (2 Chronicles 9:28).

☉ Multiple wives

He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray (1 Kings 11:3).

☉ Accumulating large amounts of silver and gold

...I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well — the delights of a man's heart (Eccl. 2:8).

☉ Obviously does not read law

Perhaps, he does not have the scroll of law, since the love for the Word of God draws away from sin. Do you recall how it is written?

I have hidden your word in my heart that I may not sin against you (Psalm 119:11).

Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble (Psalm 119:165).

Solomon's life manifested the greatest sin — disobedience toward God, and it served as a stumbling block to many.

Imagine thousands of builders, building temples for Astarte, Milhom, Hamsa, and Moloch at the request of King Solomon. Were they not partakers in Solomon's sin? There were also many priests who were supposed to perform the temple services of the pagan gods, receiving a salary from the royal treasury, collected at the expense of the Israeli people. Thus, all the people were

embroiled in idolatry. And it is not surprising that the people of Israel, speaking to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, said, *Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you (1 Kings 12:4).*

Let's take a closer look at the spiritual state of King Solomon, and especially in the second half of his reign. For this we turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes, written by King Solomon at the end of his life, when the temple and the royal house were built, which took about twenty years (Eccl. 2:4).

Also, he began the construction of the temple, not immediately, but only in the fourth year of his reign. So, let us hear

Eccles. 2:4-10 — a passage in seven verses, where I meet the words *myself, me, my, I* countless times:

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well — the delights of a man's heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil.

It seems that the great work undertaken by Solomon was accomplished not for God and His people, but for himself, King Solomon and personal glory. Is not the result of these wrong motives that befell King Solomon the depression manifested in the words recorded in **Eccles. 3:18-21**?

I also said to myself, «As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?»

What scary doubts! Truly true are the words of Holy Scripture: *...he who sows into flesh of flesh will reap corruption, and he who sows of spirit into spirit will reap eternal life (Gal. 6:8).*

When a person sows into the spirit, he experiences a spiritual ascent, heartfelt joy — a testimony of God's approval. And he who sows in his flesh can experience what Solomon has — depression and frustration.

How sad that a man, beloved and chosen by God, who had modesty and wisdom, ends his life in the ranks of the opponents of God, who caused His wrath on himself and on Israel. Neither great wisdom nor vast knowledge protected King Solomon from the fall, but, perhaps, on the contrary, contributed to this. So, as once happened to a cherub overshadowing, which was *...the seal of perfection, the fullness of wisdom and the crown of beauty (Ezek. 28:12).*

From your beauty your heart was lifted up, from your vanity you destroyed your wisdom... (Ezek. 28:17).

Wisdom divorced from the One who gives it may lead to the fall of anyone who will possess it. Yes, and it ceases to be the wisdom of God, but it turns out, as stated above, ruined by wisdom. Destroyed wisdom is peculiar to the former cherub overshadowing — the devil. This wisdom is *earthly, soulful, demonic (James 3:15).*

This wisdom is used to spread its influence, gain authority and popularity. She works for the human ego, which is contrary to God. Remember the appeal of Jesus Christ to the Father: *...I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid this from the wise and prudent and opened it to babies. Hey, Father! For such was Your favor (Luke 10:21)?*

SO WHAT, IS HAVING WISDOM BAD?

Why, then, was Solomon's request for wisdom to be pleasing to God? The fact is that when young Solomon asked God for wisdom, he had absolutely the right motives: *...to judge your people and discern what is good and what is evil; for who can rule this multitude of thy people? (1 Kings 3:9).*

But subsequently, the wisdom received from God becomes for Solomon something that replaced God Himself. Wisdom helped him to become famous and famous, causing admiration of the surrounding nations and their kings. And they came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth, who heard of his wisdom (1 Kings 4:34).

The confluence of people from all nations! What a great opportunity for the evangelization and acceptance of the God of Solomon by other nations! God possessing such wisdom and giving it to people.

Solomon, did you tell people to come about the Creator? Was this the main theme for you, as it was for your father, King David? And how many people repented of their sins, received forgiveness and salvation from your sermons? Has the nation grown spiritually from your wisdom, Solomon? And what have you done for the children of Israel, besides raising taxes and imposing cruel works on them?

Let us see where the wisdom of Solomon spread: *...and he spoke of trees, of cedars, that in Lebanon, before the hyssop (bunch of grass) growing from the wall; he spoke of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish (1 Kings 4:33).*

Solomon was concerned with everything, and he reasoned about almost everything. Tried a lot and tried out of what we would not want our children. For example: *I thought in my heart to delight my body with wine and, while my heart was guided by wisdom, to adhere to stupidity, until I see what is good for the sons of men, what they should do under heaven in the few days of their life (Eccles. 2:3).*

Solomon also spoke of many divine truths. But did they change him to the extent that he could remain completely dependent on God and in old age? We see that it did not happen. But as in the case of the cherub overshadowing, so the feeling of its importance and independence from God came to Solomon, which led to the subsequent fall. It is appropriate to give an amazing text from the Holy Scripture, which says what wisdom and intelligence lie: *they will say: only this great nation is a wise and wise nation (Deut. 4:6).*

There are many Christians today who want to have wisdom and knowledge in order to stand out from the general environment and become famous. Some make sacrifices and, while studying in Bible schools, acquire knowledge to become pastors and teachers. And for many this leads to pride and independence not only from brothers and sisters, but also from God Himself.

But everything is much simpler. Everything must be in the love of God, in strict observance of the Word of God, in daily obedience to the truth and being led by the Holy Spirit. As it is written, but *whoever loves God is given knowledge from Him (1 Cor. 8:3).*

So it is important to find mercy in the eyes of the Lord, who alone is able to preserve and *present you as holy and blameless and innocent before himself (Col. 1:22).*

Aleksandr BORISENKO.



Drawing by Igor OSOKIN, Russia

Solomon, to know what is in his heart, for his mouth speaks from the abundance of heart (Luke 6:45).

I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune (Ecclesiastes 2:18-21).

What troubles Solomon and what does he call great evil? Why does he regret having to leave something for whom he has worked? Is it bad that your work will not be wasted and someone will use it, especially if it is your own children? Do you see undisguised egoism in these words? Especially when Solomon emphasizes that with this work he *...showed himself wise under the sun (Eccles. 2:19)?*

Here we are talking about our own person, glorified by successful deeds. And again the sadness in the words: *And he will dispose of all my labor...* (that is, not someone else's labor, but mine). Is it yours, Solomon? Has not the wisdom of God given you success and blessings? Was Solomon's heart tied to the earthly, if he was so sad that he had to leave it all, or perhaps because someone would dispose of it all as he pleased?

To better understand the reason for the sorrow of Solomon, reflecting on his withdrawal, let's carefully read the passage

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

❁ INTRODUCTION

Many consider the story of the Flood a pure fiction or game of religious imagination. However, to date there is not a single scientific evidence that refutes the biblical flood described in the **Book of Genesis (chapters 7–9)**.

Let's take a look at some frequently asked questions about the Flood.

❁ WHERE DID THIS AMOUNT OF WATER COME FROM?

Reading the biblical story about the Flood, we learn a lot of different details. Some of them concern the question of the huge amount of water: where it came from and where it went later. The Bible reveals this mystery in **Genesis 7:11**: *...all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.*

❁ «The Windows of Heaven»

As you might imagine, the windows of heaven refer to precipitation in the form of rain.

❁ «The Fountains of the Great Deep»

Since *the fountains of the great deep* are mentioned before *the windows of heaven*, it shows us that the first place of importance was water from the fountains of the great deep. That is, we can conclude that the greater the amount of water erupted from the ground.

Where did the water come from under the ground? When we read about the creation of the earth, we see that the earth came out from under the water on the third day of creation. Thus, we can conclude that a huge amount of water was contained not only in the seas and oceans, but also under the crust, which, during the Flood, came to light and allowed water to go outside.

Among the remains and fossils found of people, animals and plants, there have been a huge amount of volcanic stones. From this we can conclude that, most likely, the eruption of water from the ground was accompanied by volcanic activity. The most interesting thing is that even today the eruption of volcanoes is accompanied by the eruption of a large amount of water! Moreover, **seventy percent** of a volcanic eruption is water, and often in the form of a huge fountain.

❁ WAS THE FLOOD WORLDWIDE?

❁ Nine Pieces of Evidence that the Flood Was Truly Global

Some people and scientists believe that the biblical flood was not global, but local. They do not believe that the flood waters could cover the whole earth and all the mountains. Moreover, many of them believe that Noah with his family and animals drifted in one of the seas. They also think that all people of the antediluvian period occupied an insignificant territory, being in close proximity to each other.

Let's take a look at how the Bible answers the question about the Flood.

1. Water covered all the mountains. The tops of the greatest mountains were covered with water at least seven meters above (**Genesis 7: 19-20**). In addition, **Genesis 7:18-24** and **Genesis 8:1-5** state that this level of water

was maintained on earth for five months.

2. The ark was huge. The ark was necessary in order to prevent the extermination of man and animals. If the Flood were not global, but local, then God would simply have told Noah to move to another locality. God warned Noah about the Flood a hundred and twenty years before the Flood. In our opinion, one hundred and twenty years is more than enough to move to the other

differs from the commonly used word to describe small local floods. For example, in Hebrew it is *Mabbool*, in Greek — *Kataklysmos* (cataclysm!). Thus, the Bible emphasizes the uniqueness of the flood that occurred during the time of Noah.

7. God's covenant and rainbow. After the Flood, God promised the people that He would never send a global flood to the face of the earth (**Genesis 8:21, 9:8-17**). The

(except those who were in the ark) were destroyed from the face of the earth.

❁ HOW DID LAND PLANTS SURVIVE THE FLOOD?

The secret lies in the fact that most of the seeds of land plants can easily survive a long stay under water, especially in salt. Truly, salty water is a great preservative, therefore the seeds are stored longer in salty water than in fresh

salty the waters of the seas and oceans were before the Flood.

Many researchers and scientists believe that sea water was less salty (perhaps two to three times). Moreover, as we noted above, the eruption of water from the ground (**Genesis 7:11**) was accompanied by volcanic activity.

Volcanoes, as is well known, emit a huge amount of steam, and red-hot lava brings steam and water to a boil. Hot water dissolves minerals, becoming saltier. At the same time, water tends to wash salt out of the ground. Thus, the water flowing into the ocean brings with it salt and makes sea water saltier. In other words, all this proves that the sea water before the Flood was less salty than it is now.

The problem is this: freshwater fish tends to absorb the water in which it is located, because fresh water tends to wash out salt from the fish body (the process is called osmosis). At the same time, marine fish strive to get rid of water in their bodies, because the surrounding water is too salty and introduces too much salt into the fish organism.

❁ Adaptation of freshwater fish to sea water

Many of today's marine organisms can survive in water with a low salt concentration. For example, a starfish can survive in water, the salinity of which is only 16–18% of the salinity of sea water.

There also exist such species of fish that constantly migrate from sea water to fresh and back. For example, pink salmon, chum salmon and other species of red fish go to spawn in freshwater bodies. Eels multiply in salt water, and then return to freshwater bodies. Many varieties of fish easily adapt to both salt and fresh water. In addition, the same species of fish can specialize in survival only in salt water or only in fresh water. For example, the Atlantic sturgeon is a marine fish that spawns in fresh water, and the Siberian sturgeon (a species of the same species) lives only in freshwater sources.

Many fish families consist of freshwater and saltwater fish at the same time. These varieties of fish include toad fish, sickle fish, sturgeon, herring, anchovy, salmon, trout, pike, goby, sucker fish, stick fish, scorpion fish, flounder and some others. Indeed, most of the existing fish today are able to survive in both fresh and salt water. Thus, we can safely say that the ability to adapt to salt water was laid in the fishes at the creation of the world.

Hybrids of wild trout (freshwater) and artificially bred pink salmon and salmon were found in Scotland, and this confirms the theory that the difference between sea and freshwater fish is not so significant.

Most public aquariums use the ability of fish to adapt to water, the salinity of which differs from the salinity of their habitat. Thus, visitors observe marine and freshwater fish in the same aquarium. Fish can easily adapt to different salinity levels if salinity increases or decreases gradually.

(Continued on the 12th page)

THE GREAT FLOOD



end of the earth. Besides, why would it be necessary to build such a huge ark if the flood were insignificant?

3. People inhabited the entire (!) Earth. A thousand, six hundred years of human life on Earth led to the fact that its population had become incredibly large. Some researchers believe that in those days, the Earth was inhabited by several million or even billions of people! The Bible confirms this by stating the following: a) the people multiplied greatly on earth (**Genesis 6:1**); b) the whole earth was filled with sin (**Genesis 6:11-12**). The Bible openly testifies that mankind could not but spread beyond Mesopotamia: this territory was too small for such a large number of people, especially considering the sin and violence that had spread among people at that time.

4. The global flood destroyed all people. The Bible teaches that *all flesh in which there was the breath of life* was destroyed from the face of the earth, that is, all people died (**Genesis 7:21**), except for Noah and his family (**Genesis 9:1**). Thus, the Bible claims that every person who exists on earth today is a descendant of Noah's family.

5. All land animals also died during the Flood. The population of the entire Earth (all breathing creatures) inhabiting the land (except those who were in the ark) was destroyed by the waters of the Flood (**Genesis 7:21, 9:16**). If the Flood were local, there would be no need for animal rescue and no need for an ark.

6. It was a great cataclysm, not just a small flood. The word flood, which is used in the Bible to describe the global Flood,

evidence of this promise is a rainbow. It is a sign of God and a sign for the entire population of the earth — people and animals. God cannot break His word!

8. Why was it necessary to be in the ark for a year? Noah spent a little more than a year in the ark — not forty days at all, as many believe (**Genesis 8:14**). Fifty-three weeks in the ark is too much for a local flood. The water after the Flood was decreasing from the surface of the earth for four months. And all this time the land was not suitable for life (**Genesis 8:9**). All these testimonies do not fit in with our concepts and ideas about a local flood. But they are quite consistent with the description of the global Flood.

9. All the land was destroyed. God said in **Genesis 6:13**: *I will destroy them [the people] from the earth.* The Bible testifies to the worldwide nature of the Flood more than thirty times in the **Book of Genesis** alone (chapters 6–9). In the **Book of the prophet Isaiah (54:9)**, God repeats: *I swore that the waters of Noah would not come again to the earth.* Apostle Peter warns us that God, who created the earth, destroyed it with the Flood and that the day will come when He will destroy it again, but this time with fire (**2 Peter 3:5-7**). Here we see that Peter does not mean partial (local) destruction of the earth. He says that the whole earth will burn. Just as Noah's flood was worldwide, the Last Judgment will be just as global.

Thus, the Bible makes it clear that Noah's flood was universal and that as a result of this flood all the land-breathing animals and people

water. Other plants could survive if they floated on the surface of the water.

Also, many of the surviving plants could have been a part of those plants that were on board the ark as food for the animals and the family of Noah (**Genesis 6:21**).

Some seeds could have clung to the animal fur and thus survived the Flood. Other seeds could have been preserved in the stomachs of drowned animals floating on the surface.

The olive leaf, which was brought to Noah by a dove (**Genesis 8:11**), indicates that the earth began to regenerate and become covered with plants long before Noah left the ark.

Conclusion. There are many explanations as to how a part of the plants could have survived the global Flood. Therefore, one should not doubt the authenticity of the biblical story of the Flood.

❁ HOW DID FISH AND OTHER SEA CREATURES MANAGE TO SURVIVE THE FLOOD?

Many people ask this question: *If the whole earth was covered by the waters of the Worldwide Flood, then surely there should have been a mixture of the saline waters of the seas and oceans with the fresh waters of rivers and lakes. We know that many marine fish cannot survive in fresh water, just as freshwater fish cannot survive in sea water. How did both species of fish, both marine and freshwater, survive?*

According to the biblical story, only land animals and birds which had the breath of life were taken on board the ark (**Genesis 7:14-15, 21-23**). In addition, no one knows how

THE GREAT FLOOD

(Ending. Beginning on the 11th page)

Many fish species can adapt to both freshwater and seawater in just one generation.

Sea animals, such as whales and dolphins, easily survive when turbidity and water temperature change, and so on. Ninety-five percent of the remains found make up the inhabitants of the sea. Some, such as trilobites and ichthyosaurs, were most likely exterminated during the Flood.

Conclusion. To date, scientists have a sufficient number of facts confirming that freshwater and saltwater fish survived the Flood. Therefore, there is no need to doubt the authenticity of the biblical flood, as the Bible describes it.

WERE THERE DINOSAURS IN THE ARK?

The Bible does not list the names of all the animals and birds that Noah gathered into the ark. It only states that all species of land animals and birds were represented in pairs (Genesis 6:19-20, 7:15-16).

There is much evidence and evidence that dinosaurs existed after the Flood. For example, Leviathan (Job 40:19 — 41:26) and the so-called behemoth (Job 40:10-19). Please do not confuse it with animals that we call hippos today! In the biblical behemoth (see the description of the behemoth in the 40th chapter of the Book of Job; the description of the Leviathan in the 40—41th chapter of the Book of Job) the structure of the body differs from the modern hippopotamus. Pay attention to the description of his abdomen, legs and tail.

The ark was very large to fulfill God's plan. Noah took one hundred and twenty years to build it. All these years, Noah used to testify to others about the Flood, thereby trying to convince them to turn away from their sins and turn to God for salvation.

The ark was designed to place on its board a huge number of animals and birds, including dinosaurs. Most of the animals

were supposedly hibernating most of the time.

Noah did not have to go looking for and collecting animals into the ark. God Himself brought all the animals to the ark. By animals we mean cubs and young ones. Thus, Noah could well have gathered on board the ark the cubs of all the dinosaur species. Small

people was accomplished in the form of the Flood.

The Lord destroyed the world of the wicked by the waters of the Flood. Their cities and all property were buried under silt and rocks. This catastrophe was so great that it radically changed the environment and the geography of the Earth. The



dinosaurs occupied less place on the ark and presented no problems for Noah and his family. In addition, they consumed less food than adults.

WHY DID GOD SEND THE FLOOD?

The Bible clearly demonstrates that people before the Flood were mired in sin. It was so disgusting in the eyes of God that He repented of the creation of man on earth (Genesis 6:5-7 — And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them). The Bible says that the earth had become terrible, people were corrupted and thought only of evil. Life was full of violence, evil and terror.

The heart of God was breaking from pain at the sight of such corruption and degradation. God's judgment on the antediluvian generation of

flood is a testimony and a reminder that God does not leave sin unpunished.

The following verses from the New Testament also testify to this:

Matthew 24:36-43 — *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*

2 Peter 3:3-7 — *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his*

coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

WAS THE GARDEN OF EDEN DISCOVERED?

Here is what the Bible says about the location of the Garden of Eden:

And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah... And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And

the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates (Genesis 2:10-14).

Many Christians believe that the Garden of Eden was in Mesopotamia (around modern Iraq) where the modern Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow.

The Bible speaks of the Flood that took place hundreds of years after the fall of Adam and Eve. However, it is necessary to understand that the antediluvian world (including the rivers listed above and the Garden of Eden) was buried under a thick layer of sedimentary rocks.

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers are 100% not the rivers of the Garden of Eden. They flow over the rocks that are teeming with the remains of people and animals who died during the Flood. The similar name of the rivers is evidence that the descendants of the Noah family named these rivers according to the memories of those rivers that existed before the Flood. Why did they decide to call them that? Probably for the same reason that many settlers who arrived from the British Isles in America and Australia, called their settlements in the new land with the same names as the cities in their homeland were called.

In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to the description of the rivers, which states that one river divided into four. If we look at today's map, we see that not a single river in the Middle East corresponds to the biblical description.

The Garden of Eden was destroyed forever by the waters of the global Flood. To date, scientists are not able to determine where it was before the Flood.

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



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