

SIMPLIFYING FAITH LECTURE SERIES

By H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy

#3 The Status of the Bible and The Impossibility of Distorting its Words

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

The Unity of the Bible:

The Holy Bible consists of two main sections - The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible is unique, although it is divided into books - and the books are divided into chapters - we can never separate the words of God.

If the grace of God were present in the life of a person, and the Holy Spirit works in his heart, he would feel the unity of the Holy Bible. Saint Paul the Apostle wrote the following to his disciple Timothy, *“All Scripture 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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* (2 Tim 3:16-17). God’s inspiration throughout the scripture demonstrates the Bible’s unity.

Saint Peter in his second epistle wrote, *“...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Pt 1:20-21).

The Holy Bible is a treasure; a very precious possession that we should keep and a commitment that we have received. So, how can we allow the Bible to live inside us, and how can we keep its words?

The Gospel is a Witness for the Resurrection:

Saint Paul the Apostle wrote wonderful words concerning the Bible, to his disciple Timothy saying, *“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Tim 1:8-10).

Fundamentally he told him to share in the sufferings for the sake of the gospel by writing, *“But has now been revealed”*. How had it been revealed? The answer is, *“By the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and*

immortality to light through the gospel". We know that the Lord Jesus Christ trampled upon death by His death; He conquered death and arose from the dead in victory.

Here, there is a very important point to make: because the Lord Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, He sent forth His disciples throughout the world to preach His resurrection. This is the mystery that lies behind the might and power of Christianity. Therefore, Saint Paul said that the Lord, "...has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". The events of the resurrection required the 500 witnesses as mentioned in the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, where it reads, "After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep." (1Cor 15:6). These observers became witnesses for the resurrection throughout the entire world.

The Gospel is a Commitment:

Saint Paul continued saying, "...to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." (2 Tim 1:11-12). He suffered for the sake of the gospel, and even when he was imprisoned, he was not embarrassed of his imprisonment, in order to preach the greatness of the Lord. He did not feel ashamed, because he knew in Whom he had believed. He was persuaded that Christ was able to keep him until that day, since he knew that, "...All things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom 8:28).

When Saint Paul the Apostle was imprisoned, he wrote to the Philippians saying, "... the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard" (Phil 1:12-13). In other words, he was telling them, 'When I was placed in chains and sent to the palace, it was an opportunity for all those in the palace to listen to the gospel. When I was placed in chains, the gospel was not hindered, but was still spreading. "The word of God is not chained." (2 Tim 2:9).

Saint Paul also wrote, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us." (2 Tim 1:13-14). Here, he mentioned the key point, which was to, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words...That good thing which was committed to you keep". This is an important commitment that we should keep throughout the ages. From age to age it was committed: from the prophets, to the apostles, and then to the church.

The Holy Spirit Keeps the Gospel:

Saint Paul said, "That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us." (2 Tim 1:14). Hence, the Holy Spirit is the keeper of the gospel. Furthermore, the apostle did not say, 'the Holy Spirit who dwells in you' but he said,

“...*the Holy Spirit who dwells in us*”. The Holy Spirit works in the entire community of saints in order to preserve the Bible and its sound teachings. He does not work in heretics, evildoers, or in lost persons.

A New Covenant:

The Lord spoke of a new covenant on the mouth of Jeremiah the Prophet, who lived hundreds of years prior to Christ, regarding the status of the Holy Bible in the New Testament. He said, “*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.*” (Jer 31:31-32). Here, He spoke of a new covenant that differed from the old covenant; He also spoke of man’s reaction towards it. In the old, His people broke His covenant.

The words in the books of the Old and New Testaments are the words of God; since it is written, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*” (2 Tim 3:16).

The Law Written in the Hearts:

In the Book of Jeremiah, God continued, saying, “*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*” (Jer 31:33). In former days the law was written on tablets of stone. God gave Moses two “...*tablets of stone, written with the finger of God*” (Ex 31:18). He had written four commandments on the first tablet, and six on the second.

In the above mentioned verse, God gave a new promise, saying He would put His law in the people’s minds and write it on their hearts. He said, “...*I will be their God, and they shall be My people*”. The Bible is written inside our hearts, as the Lord Jesus Christ promised saying, “*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*” (Jn 14:26). Furthermore, He said to His disciples: “...*when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*” (Jn 16:13).

These promises by God were fulfilled, and when the disciples commenced the writing of the gospels, they remembered these promises. When Saint Mathew wrote ‘The Sermon on the Mount’, how could he have been able to remember all the words spoken by the Lord if it had not been the Holy Spirit who reminded him? The Holy Spirit inspired Saint Mathew and reminded him of the details.

In the following words, we recognize a very wonderful promise which says, “*I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts.*” When reading the Bible, we should

be in the spirit, in reverence, praying, and in a state of communion with God. We should feel that the words, which our eyes are seeing, are already written in our hearts. In other words, we will not feel we are reading unusual words. On the contrary, we will feel as though we are reading words that are already living inside us; words that God utters inside us by the power of the Holy Spirit that is living within us.

Accordingly, we can very easily discern if what we read is truly the word of God. For example, a person may claim that he has in his possession a Bible or scripture from the Old or New Testaments. If we were to flip through the pages, we could easily determine the authenticity of the words, without needing extra research into history, languages, or the sciences. Whether a young child or an old man, all could recognize the words of God, since it is written in the book of Jeremiah, *“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord.”* (Jer 31:34).

The House of Israel:

One might erroneously think that the covenant mentioned in the book of Jeremiah is intended for Israel and Judah. Israel, in the spiritual sense, is the people of God. As a church, we who believed in Christ became the people of God. The genuine Israel are the people who believe in the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, while those who are the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob according to the flesh are not considered the true Israel.

In the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans he writes, *“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, In Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”* (Rom 9:6-9).

When the apostle wrote, *“...the children of promise...”*, he was referring to God’s promise to Abraham which says, *“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen 22:18, see also Acts 3:25). Furthermore, Saint Paul wrote, *“He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.”* (Gal 3:16). The word ‘seed’ refers to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the promise, and in this ‘seed’ *“all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”*. Nations here refer to all the gentiles.

Similarly, in the book of Isaiah the Lord says, *“Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth!”* (Is 45:22). This means salvation is for everyone. The Israelites who believes in Christ is considered of the people of God; while the Israelites who rejects Christ is never considered of the people of God. On the other hand, a gentile who believes in Christ is considered a son of the promise, and becomes the true Israelite.

A Story:

The following story provides evidence that the Holy Spirit can teach us what is contained in the Holy Scriptures.

Once there was a young lady from a Christian family in Alexandria during the first centuries of Christianity whose name was Mary. Mary was twelve years old when her parents died. As a result, some evil people befriended her, and so she deviated from the correct path. She lived an adulterous life, and the devil prevailed over her, because she was an adolescent.

During the Holy Week of Pascha and for the Feast of the Resurrection, the Christians would journey to Jerusalem. They sailed from Alexandria to the Port of Joppa, and then they would continue on land until they reached Jerusalem¹. At that time, Alexandria was the main port in Egypt.

Mary noticed many people traveling to Jerusalem, including numerous youths and men, so she found this an opportunity to indulge in her sin. She sailed to the Holy Land, hoping to commit her sin on the ship and in the tourist land².

When she reached Jerusalem, she followed the other travelers into the church of the resurrection. When she tried to enter the church, she felt a mighty force which prevented her from entering. She continued trying, but her efforts were in vain. Mary felt that God was angry and started crying. She went to the icon of Saint Mary the Mother of God carrying the Lord Jesus Christ, and wept bitterly. As she was weeping, she heard a voice which told her, 'If you want to be saved, go into the wilderness'. She obeyed the voice and left for the wilderness of the Jordan River³.

She lived alone in the wilderness for 50 years. During one particular Lent, Saint Zosimus met her. At first, he thought Mary was a vision or a phantom because she tried to escape from him. When he approached her, she asked him to keep away because she was naked. He threw his robe to her and she put it on, so he was able to draw near and speak to her. The saint asked her to tell him her story, and she told him all that had occurred.

When Mary spoke, she mentioned verses from the Bible, so he wondered how she knew these verses, since she had no books and had been living in the wilderness for 50 years.

¹ During the festivals of Saint Demiana, many people from all over Egypt visit her monastery to take her blessing.

² In the past, some people would come to the festivals of Saint Demiana to dance and drink alcohol. We thank God that through education, and by preventing these people from entering the grounds where the festivals are held, this is no longer the case. It is true that some people attend festivals of saints because they seek entertainment.

³ This is near the mount where the Lord was tempted after His baptism. When you leave the Jericho heights, you will first pass by the mount where Christ was tempted, and then by Mount Zion where the old city of Jerusalem is erected.

She told him that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the saintly fathers to write the scriptures, taught her what is contained in them.

Mary then asked him to return to her the following year with the body and blood of Christ so that she could partake of the Holy Communion. He returned to her, and after taking communion, she went a little farther from where the saint was, and started to pray. As she was praying, he noticed that she was not touching the ground, but was raised approximately one meter. At that moment she knelt and died. Saint Zosimus buried her body, and wrote her entire story.

She was called Mary of Egypt, despite the fact that she did not live in Egypt.

This story demonstrates that we should not feel that the Holy Bible is strange to us. Therefore, we never accept the claims of those who say that the Bible is falsified, distorted, or biased.

What is the Holy Bible?:

The Holy Bible is the word of God. In the book of Jeremiah it is written, *“The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign...Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”* (Jer 1:1-5).

Jeremiah was afraid when the Lord told him that he would be a prophet to the nations. He quickly replied, *“Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth. But the Lord said to me: Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak.”* (Jer 1:6-7). So, we see that it is God who sent the words to Jeremiah. The Lord then said, *“Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.”* (Jer 1:8-9). The Lord did not want him to fear anyone; not even kings, because the words Jeremiah would speak were the words of God.

God then continued, *“See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant.”* (Jer 1:10). This means that Jeremiah would not root out, pull down, destroy, throw down, build or plant with his own hand, because he was only a poor person. Rather, he would do all this by the words of his mouth, which were really the words of the Lord. If the prophet prophesied that a certain city would be destroyed that would occur; if he prophesied that the people would be captured, this event would take place. As though his words were commands.

Jeremiah then wrote, *“Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? And I said, I see a branch of an almond tree. Then the Lord said to me,*

You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it.” (Jer 1:11-12). He was watchful and ready to perform His word.

The Holy Bible is the word of God, therefore when we read it, we should read it with reverence and respect. Some nowadays scholars criticize the Bible, which is not proper. They call it ‘Biblical criticism’, but we completely reject this idea because, who can oppose the word of God. On the contrary, the word of God enlightens our path; it is written, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.” (Ps 119:105).*

God told Moses and the people of Israel, *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deut 6:6-9).* God wanted His words to be in their hearts; He wanted them to talk of them when they sat in their homes, when they walked on the way, when they lay down, and when they rose up. He wanted them always to mediate on His words and commandments; He wanted them to bind them on their hands. Some people nowadays bind their names on their hands, but we should rather bind the words of the commandments of God. Furthermore, we should put the words of God before our eyes. We should surround ourselves with His verses, on our doorposts and on the gates of our houses, so that God’s words keep us.

When the Lord commands us to put His words in our hearts, he means we should memorize them. This is a divine command to memorize the Holy Scriptures. If we do not memorize the word of God, His law is not in our hearts. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III always offers the following advice, *“Keep (memorize) the psalms and the psalms will keep you.”*

The Holy Bible is the Basis for the Christian Faith:

Both the Old Testament and the New Testaments are the basis for the Christian faith. The Christian religion did not emerge out of a vacuum, but there were numerous prophecies concerning salvation and Jesus Christ. For example, there is a prophecy in the Bible concerning the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ from a virgin: *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Is 7:14).*

With reference to the Lord’s place of birth we find the following prophecy: *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” (Mic 5:2).* Isaiah the prophet also said the following: *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6).*

About the flight into Egypt, the following prophecy was written: *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.”* (Hos 11:1).

Concerning His entrance into Jerusalem, we read, *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey”* (Zac 9:9).

Pertaining to the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the prophecy says, *“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”* (Is 53:7).

Furthermore, regarding the events of the crucifixion, David the Psalmist prophesized saying, *“For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.”* (Ps 22:16-18).

A Conversation with a Jew:

I once met a Jewish lawyer and asked him how Jews obtain forgiveness of their sins. He said that they obtained forgiveness from God. I told him, ‘But the holy scriptures affirm that forgiveness is through sacrifice, and you no longer offer any sacrifices because the temple was destructed more than 1,900 years ago. You do not have sacrifices for the remission of sins, because the true sacrifice is the sacrifice of the cross.’ The lawyer became tense, and said that the Jews rejected the idea of a human sacrifice. Hence I told him, ‘Do you know Psalm 22?’ He said that he did, and started to read it. I told him, ‘This psalm was written by David. Did anyone pierce the hands and legs of David? Or did he die peacefully on his bed, and was honored as a king as is written in the scriptures? About whom then is this psalm speaking?’

The psalm says, *“My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots. But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.”* (Ps 22:15-22).

The Jewish lawyer kept gazing at the psalm, then he confessed that it is a very accurate description of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Metropolitan Abraham of Jerusalem was present during this conversation.

Therefore we say that Christianity did not emerge out of a vacuum, but rather that it was founded on prophecies which holy prophets declared thousands of years prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christianity Was Established on Prophecies:

Our Lord Jesus Christ declared that Moses wrote about Him (see Jn 5:46), He also said, “*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*” (Jn 8:56).

On the day John the Baptist was born, it is written: “*Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.*” (Lk 1:67-75).

Christianity’s foundation was established on numerous prophecies. For thousands of years God had prepared humanity for the coming of the savior.

Some examples for prophecies that were written about the Lord’s suffering and crucifixion are, “*...nor shall you break one of its bones...*” (Ex 12:46). In the book of Isaiah it is written, “*And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors*” (Is 53:12). Furthermore he wrote, “*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*” (Is 53:7). He also wrote, “*A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*” (Is. 53:3), and then he said, “*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*” (Is. 53:9). Christ was crucified with thieves, and it was intended that His body be placed in the graves of criminals. However, the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea rushed to Pilate, asked for the body, and placed it in his new tomb (see Mat 27:57).

In the Psalms it is written, “*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*” (Ps 16:10). Christ’s body did not see corruption, and He was resurrected in victory on the third day. Thus it is written, “*I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.*” (Ps 3:5). Furthermore, Hosea writes, “*After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.*” (Hos 6:2). This is another prophecy concerning Christ’s resurrection.

A prophecy concerning the incarnation says, “*He bowed the heavens also, and came down With darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind.*” (Ps 18:9-10). And about the Lord’s ascension, the psalmist

writes, *“God has ascended with a shout, The Lord, with the sound of a trumpet.”* (Ps 47:5).

Regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit, the scripture says, *“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”* (Jo 2:28-29).

No occurrence in the New Testament was not prophesied in the Old Testament. The above mentioned references are only a few examples of many that were declared in the Holy Scriptures.

Enemies Fulfilling the Prophecies:

There is a significant point to mention concerning the fulfillment of the prophecies: many of the prophecies were not fulfilled by the friends of Christ, but rather by His enemies. If His friends were the only ones to fulfil the prophecies, then perhaps at some point it might be argued that His friends deliberately fulfilled the prophecies to give the impression that the prophecies applied to Him. However, Christ’s enemies and killers shared in the fulfillment of the prophecies. For example, the prophecies concerning the disciple who betrayed Him say, *“The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords”* (Ps 55:21), and, *“Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.”* (Ps 41:9).

Furthermore, Judas sold the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, and this was the exact amount mentioned by the prophet: *“So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, Throw it to the potter that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter”* (Zec 11:12-13). This is precisely what occurred when Judas threw the pieces of silver, as it is written, *“...the chief priest took the silver pieces and said, It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood. And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.”* (Mat 27:6-7).

The chief priests, Judas Iscariot, Pontius Pilate, and King Herod, all fulfilled the prophecies despite being the Christ’s enemies. It is written, *“Thus says the Lord: A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.”* (Jer 31:15). Herod *“...sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet.”* (Mat 2: 16-17). During this slaughter, the Lord Jesus Christ fled to Egypt in order to complete the redemption by the cross, and fulfill the prophecies. He did not flee out of fear, but in order to begin His mission, preach the New Testament teachings, and then offer Himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of the entire world.

Unaccepted Prophecies:

Some Biblical prophecies could have never been accepted by the Jews, although they are written in their books. For instance, in the book of Isaiah it is written, *“In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border”* (Is 19:19). This verse troubles the Jews, since they oppose the thought that an altar might exist outside Jerusalem. They would have killed the prophet Isaiah when he said these words; and finally they did. Despite this fact, however, the words still exist in the book of Isaiah, which they consider as scripture in their Holy Bible.

Furthermore, the following is written: *“And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt... Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the Lord and perform it.”* (Is 19:20-21). What Jew can accept that there would be an altar for the Lord in Egypt? Today, the Jews are scattered all over the world, yet they have never erected an altar outside Jerusalem. They are currently fighting to prevail over Jerusalem, seeking to reestablish an altar in the original location of Solomon’s temple, unsuccessfully. If it were possible for them to erect an altar anywhere, they would have done so long ago, however, the altar mentioned in the prophecy of Isaiah, is a New Testament altar.

Regarding the coming of the Lord to the land of Egypt Isaiah writes, *“Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, And will come into Egypt; The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst”* (Is 19:1).

Jewish Fanaticism:

It is impossible to distort the Bible, neither the Old nor the New Testaments. If we altered even a letter in the Old Testament, the Jews would have opposed us. They would have argued that we were rewriting verses in order to prove our Christianity. We never attempted to alter it, and the Jews have never claimed that we added verses to the book of Isaiah or any other book.

In Qumran, two full texts of the book of Isaiah dating back to the second century B.C. were discovered. The two texts are exactly the same as the text contained in the book of Isaiah which we refer to today.

The Jewish custom in writing the Old Testament scriptures was very strict. The scribe was required to wash his body, put on Jewish attire, and write. The writing was permitted only on foils made of the skin of pure animals. The ink used, had to be pure black and made of honey and carbon. Not one word was to be written from memory, and the scribe had to read each word out aloud as it was written. Moreover, when writing one of the names of God, the writer was required to wash his body again, write with a specific pen, and use specific ink. Furthermore, if a manuscript had more than three mistakes, it was destroyed. The Jews memorized each book of the Old Testament - its sections, lines, verses, words, and letters. For example, they knew that the letter ‘Aleph’ (A) occurred

42,377 times in the Hebrew Torah. Thus, they counted the letters, and knew how many times each letter occurred. The letter 'Beth' (B) occurred 38,218 times. Therefore, the Jews easily recognized if one letter was missing, not simply if one word was missing or distorted.

The Testimony of the Gospel:

Consequently, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "*For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*" (Mat 5:18). He also said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*" (Mk 13:31).

Saint John the Evangelist wrote in the Book of Revelation, "*If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*" (Rev 22:18-19).

The Testimony of the Writings of the Fathers:

Interestingly, a group of scholars conducted a research to determine what may happen if the entire New Testament were lost. They found that, from the writings of the holy fathers of the second and third centuries, they were able to collect the entire New Testament, except for 11 verses⁴.

Moreover, the writings of the Anti-Nicene fathers were investigated, and the scholars found that the total sum of citations from the New Testament was 36,289: 19,368 from the gospels, 1,352 from Acts, 14,035 from the Epistles of Saint Paul, 870 from the Catholic Epistles, and 664 from The Revelation.

The Impossibility of Distorting the Words of the Bible:

If a person wished to alter any word in the Bible, how could he be able to collect all the versions or manuscripts from all over the world to affect the changes? How could he collect all the copies of the Bible, after they had reached all corners of the world?

One Christian burial custom was to place a copy of the Bible underneath the head of the deceased. A few years ago, during the Nag Hammadi excavations, archaeologists found a complete Coptic version of the book of Psalms dating back to the first centuries of Christianity, located under the head of a young Coptic woman.

⁴ Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986).

Furthermore, there are already some disagreements between Churches, so if one church were to distort the words of the Bible, the other church would immediately disagree. Some of these disagreements occurred during the first centuries of Christianity.

The heretics argued with the saints, just as Arius argued with Saint Athanasius the Apostolic. Arius denied the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, while Saint Athanasius defended His divinity. Arius did not tell Saint Athanasius that the verses in the Holy Bible, which he used in order to prove the divinity of Christ, did not exist; but rather, Arius misinterpreted verses and used verses that he misunderstood.

It is well known that heresies appeared in Christianity since the first century. However, it was never suggested that the Bible was distorted. Neither Jews, nor heathens, nor heretics accused Christians of distorting the contents of the Bible.

In the past, Christians paid the dear price of life for it, as they were killed for their faith in the Bible. If the words of the Bible had been distorted, why would the martyrs have sacrificed their lives for a fabrication throughout the ages? No religion throughout the world, since its dawn, has endured as many persecutions or offered as many martyrs as Christianity. So, if the Bible had been changed at some point in time, when was it changed? Where and what is the evidence for this accusation? We must also ask, where are the original and unchanged versions of the Bible?

Ancient Manuscripts:

The Lord said, *“I am watching over My word to perform it.”* (Jer 1:12). Was it impossible for the Lord to keep one version from being altered? There are many versions of the Bible (dating back to early Christianity) which may be found in today’s museums; some are complete versions, while others are incomplete. Examples of complete versions exist in the Vatican, and in the British Museum (eg. the Sinatic, the Alexandrine).

The version which exists in the Vatican (called the Vatican Version) was written in Egypt in 328 AD, following an order by Emperor Constantine the Great. It is kept in the Vatican Library, and comprises of the Old and New Testaments in Greek. The Sinatic Version was written at the end of the fourth century on delicate parchment with four columns to each page. It was discovered by a scientist at Mount Sinai, and is currently housed in the British Museum. The Alexandrine Version of the fifth century is kept at the British Museum as well.⁵

There are some sections or fragments of original versions of the Bible in various museums all over the world. Yet it has never been found that any extract, even if only one page, differs from the Bibles that we are currently using, despite its date. Therefore we disagree with the claim that the Holy Bible is distorted.

⁵ It was kept in Alexandria by the Patriarchs there till the year 1828 A.D. when Patriarch Yokares Elkridi (Greek Orthodox Patriarch) presented it to Charles I king of England who preserved it in the British Musuem.

Misunderstanding:

People sometimes feel that there are discrepancies within the Bible. For example, the Gospel of Saint Mark mentions that the Marys, “*Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week...came to the tomb **when the sun had risen...***” (Mk 16:2). But in the Gospel of Saint John he writes, “*Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, **while it was still dark***” (Jn 20:1). This is simply a misunderstanding, because when it is written “...when the sun had risen...” the evangelist was referring to the rays of the sun, not the sun itself. When the sun’s rays begin to appear, darkness is still present. If you were to stand on a rooftop at dawn, you would observe complete darkness towards the west, but you would also see rays of light starting to appear in the north. Therefore, the words “...when the sun had risen...” and “...while it was still dark...” are not contradictory.

Any contradiction that a reader comes across is due to misunderstanding, or haste in judgment. This is why one should always read the Bible in reverence and awe. We should seek the advice of the fathers and teachers of the church, and consult the writings of the holy fathers, if we are unable to comprehend any section of the Bible.

Teaching Children:

We must teach children about the Bible, and show them how to memorize it. Saint Paul the Apostle wrote to his disciple Timothy, “...*from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures⁶, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*” (2 Tim 3:15).

We should assist our children in memorizing as much of the Holy Scriptures as possible. This is a very serious responsibility; if we are negligent, then we are negligent in keeping a treasure entrusted to us.

In the first era of Christianity, believers memorized the Holy Scriptures; they were written and memorized simultaneously. In other words, the scriptures were written in both the minds and hearts of believers. The words of God should be written on paper and memorized by heart.

The Church is a Witness:

The Holy Bible is more than simply written manuscripts; it is the words of God by which the saints lived. Consequently, the Lord Jesus Christ said, “*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*” (Jn 6:63).

The church is a witness to the Bible. It is a witness to its authenticity and its infallibility. At the same time, the Holy Bible is a witness to the church.

⁶ The word ‘scripture’ here refers to the Old Testament, because during Timothy’s childhood the New Testament had not yet been written.

The Holy Bible is part of the apostolic tradition handed down to the church. The Bible safeguards the traditions of the church, since it prevents the entrance of any concepts foreign to God's mind and will. The Holy Bible guard over tradition and through a high level of authority.

The church keeps the Bible, the Bible keeps the church, and the Holy Spirit watches over both, since it is written: "...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pt 1:21).

The Bible and Church Tradition:

The Holy Spirit guides, directs, and works in the church. Consequently, the church fully respects the Holy Bible. Moreover, many excerpts from both the Old and New Testaments are read in the church on all occasions.

When the Bible is read, the deacon cries out, "Stand in the fear of God and listen to the holy gospel." Candles are also lit around the Bible, because the Bible is the light of the world. Thus Saint Paul the Apostle said about the Lord, "...our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim 1:10).

In every liturgy, or any of the seven sacraments, chapters are read from the Holy Scriptures, and a chapter is read from the gospels. A special prayer called the *Litany of the Gospel* is prayed for the Bible, in which the priest says, "Make us worthy to listen and do what is in your holy gospels through the prayers of your saints." The deacon then replies, "Pray for the spread of the holy gospel." We then remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples when He said, "...blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear..." (Mat 13:16). Therefore, we feel we are blessed for receiving this great honor of listening to the words of the gospel.

When Saint Anthony entered the church, with both ears inclined and a heart ready to obey, he heard the words of the gospel which said, "*If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.*" (Mat 19:21). He went immediately to carry out what was said in the chapter of the Holy Bible. Thus, the Father of monks went out to initiate a new phase in the history of Christian monasticism.

Our Lord Jesus Christ likens Himself to a sower who went forth to sow. His words are the seeds which "...fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Mat 13:8).

The Relationship Between the Old and the New Testaments:

Our teacher Saint Paul the Apostle wrote to his disciple Timothy saying, "...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for

salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim 3:15). Here, we see a very strong tie between the Old and New Testaments, since ‘...*the Holy Scriptures...*’ in this verse refer to the scriptures of the Old Testament. However, he continues, “...*which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*” In other words, beginning from the Old Testament, and continuing onto the New Testament, one receives wisdom, enlightenment and understanding.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “...*search the Scriptures...*” (Jn 5:39). He also said, “*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.*” (Jn 5:46). In the Gospel of Saint Luke it is written that the Lord, “...*beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*” (Lk 24:27). In the same chapter it is written, “*These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.*” (Lk 24:44). He said these words before the resurrection, and He repeated them again after the resurrection. Subsequently, “*He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.*” (Lk 24:45).

Special Prayers for Understanding:

We should dedicate special prayers to God, asking Him to enlighten our understanding, so that we may comprehend the scriptures. The Litany of the Gospel is the foremost of these prayers. Furthermore, in our personal prayers, we should ask God to grant us understanding that we might understand the Holy Scriptures.

Some people read the Bible as they are kneeling or standing in a state of prayer, since the Holy Bible is the word of God. When reading the Bible, we should say, “*I will hear what God the Lord will speak*” (Ps 85:8). Therefore, when reading, one should be in a state that will enable him to receive a heavenly message that will touch his personal life, and also to comprehend the mysteries concealed within the words. David the prophet said, “*I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure.*” (Ps 119:162). Jeremiah the Prophet said, “*Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;*” (Jer 15:16). The spiritual person is nourished by the words of the Holy Scriptures. Hence, our Lord Jesus Christ said, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Mat 4:4).

The Importance of the Old Testament:

Some people neglect studying the Old Testament. However, Saint Paul the Apostle warned his disciple Timothy saying, “...*the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim 3:15). As we earlier mentioned, the phrase ‘*Holy Scriptures*’ in this verse refers to the Old Testament scriptures. These Old Testament scriptures are able to make a person wise for salvation. They will grant you wisdom so that you may understand salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

In the Book of Jeremiah we read, *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.”* (Jer 23:5-6). These words echoed in the hearts of all people who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem. When listening to such words, one feels what Malachi the Prophet felt when he said, *“But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings”* (Mal 4:2).

The Jews and the Old Testament:

The people of Israel were hostile towards the Lord Jesus Christ. Although some of the prophecies concerning Christ caused the Jews embarrassment, their pride over their Holy Scripture prevented them from removing these prophecies. One such prophecy was written by Isaiah the Prophet: *“...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, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”* (Is 53: 4-6).

Besides the prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord said words which were upsetting to the people of Israel. For example, *“Then the Lord said to me, Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people.”* (Jer 15:1). If the Israelites wished to distort the Holy Scriptures, they would have deleted this phrase. Its retention demonstrates how vigilant they were in preserving the Holy Scriptures, and ensuring that they were not distorted.

As previously mentioned, the Jews count the lines, the number of letters in every line, and the number of lines on each page; everything is included and written. Since this is the case, how would it be possible to delete an entire word?

In the Book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah it is written, *“The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people Is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom... The hands of the compassionate women Have cooked their own children;⁷ They became food for them In the destruction of the daughter of my people. The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, And it has devoured its foundations. The kings of the earth, And all inhabitants of the world, Would not have believed That the adversary and the enemy Could enter the gates of Jerusalem, Because of the sins of her prophets And the iniquities of her priests, Who shed in her midst The blood of the just. They wandered blind in the streets; They have defiled themselves with blood, So that no one would touch their garments.”* (Lam 4: 6,10-14).

‘Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests’, even to that degree! The word “prophets” here does not refer to faithful prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah, but

⁷ A scandal: the women ate their children.

to those who prophesied falsely. Some false prophets flattered kings saying, “Go up...and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the king's hand” (see 2 Chr 18, 1 Ki 22). Therefore the Lord said, “*The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.*” (Jer 14:14).

“...*the iniquities of her priests, Who shed in her midst The blood of the just.*” These words remind us of Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests who shed the blood of Jesus Christ, the just. If ‘*the blood of the just*’ shed in the Old Testament aroused the wrath of God to that degree, how much greater would God’s wrath burn hot on those who shed the blood of His Only Begotten Son?

The words of the Lord mentioned in the aforementioned verses apply to what occurred in the days of Jeremiah. They can also be applied to what occurred in the days of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, since, “...*all the people answered and said, His blood be on us and on our children.*” (Mat 27:25).

“*They have defiled themselves with blood, So that no one would touch their garments*”. Thus ‘*the hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children. The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion.*’

Who Distorted the Bible?

If the Jews had distorted the scriptures contained in the Holy Bible, they would have removed the insults mentioned against them and the curses directed towards them. They would also have removed the clear prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

If the Christians had attempted to distort the Holy Bible, the Jews would not have permitted them, since the Jews consider the Old Testament their holy book.

When Saint Paul the Apostle said circumcision was a symbol of baptism, and that circumcision was not obligatory to attain salvation, the Jews were aroused and wanted to kill him. Forty Jews even went to the extent of binding themselves with a great oath, saying they would not eat until they had killed Paul (see Acts 23).

When the Lord Jesus Christ performed miracles and healed the sick on the Sabbath, the Jews accused Him of breaking the Law of Moses, and sentenced Him to death. Once “...*a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up*” (Lk 13:11), came to the Lord Jesus Christ, and He healed her. When the Jews complained, Christ said, “*Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound -- think of it -- for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?*” (Lk 13:15-16). The Lord told them, “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*” (Jn 7:24).

The Jews opposed anyone who did not fulfill their own interpretation of the law, not the law itself. Anyone breaking their law, was worthy of death. What then would they have done to someone who changed the text itself? The Lord Jesus Christ never altered the words of the scriptures; He simply gave the correct interpretation. He said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”* (Mk 2:27).

The Lord never told those Jews that He intended to change any words of the scripture, He only changed their erroneous interpretations. He only tried to convince them saying, *“Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound -- think of it -- for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?”* (Lk 13:15-16). *“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?”* (Jn 7:23). Their conversation focused on the interpretation of the scripture; they never argued over the actual words contained in the text.

Christ the Lord’s Witness for the Old Testament:

Our Lord Jesus Christ was a witness for the Old Testament, as previously mentioned. Furthermore, He asked the Jews, *“What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He? They said to Him, The Son of David. He said to them, How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying: The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand,”* (Mat 22: 42-44). Thus, He witnessed that what was spoken by David, was said in the Spirit.

We find many references in the New Testament that citations from the Old Testament. Additionally, there are many phrases and verses that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke in the New Testament, which are found in the Old Testament. The following verses are few examples: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”* (Lk 4:4), also, the Lord said to His disciples *“...all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”* (Lk 24:44).

Therefore, no one can ever claim that the Old Testament has been distorted.

God of the Old and New Testaments:

It is regrettable to find that even some Christians feel that we should only adhere to the New Testament, because they believe that the Old Testament contains commandments which were abolished at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some people even say that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. This is an incorrect concept, since it is man who changes, and not God. The covenant that God gave Abraham is the new covenant. Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist said, *“To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear”* (Lk 1:72-74). Therefore, the covenant was one of salvation. This is what is meant by

“Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear”. At the beginning of his prophecy he said, *“And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David”* (Lk 1:69).

Hence the oath between God and Abraham was an oath of salvation. But what do we call this oath or covenant? Is it old or new? The oath or covenant between God and Abraham concerned God’s plan to save humanity, it took place in the Old Testament, but was fulfilled in the New Testament.

Therefore, when we say the words ‘Old Testament’, we must immediately provide an explanation. If we say the words, ‘the books of the Old Testament’, then it is understood that we are referring to the scriptures written before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; this is one meaning. But if we are speaking about the testament or covenant between God and His people of which God said, *“My covenant which they broke...”* (Jer 31:32) this is another meaning.

The covenant between God and Abraham is one of salvation. Therefore, the covenant which was spoken of by God to Abraham, and which was mentioned by Zacharias the Father of John the Baptist, is the same covenant which Virgin Mary spoke of when she said, *“...my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior...As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.”* (Lk 1:47,55).

Hence, we cannot say that God of the Old Testament differs from God of the New Testament. This is why Saint Paul said, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* (Heb 13:8). Furthermore, concerning God, it is written, *“...with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”* (Jam 1:17). Man changes but God never changes.

“They said to Him, Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away? He said to them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” (Mat 19:7-8), therefore, this was His response when the Lord Jesus Christ was questioned about divorce. This demonstrates that the deficiency is not in the commandment, but in man who should fulfill the commandment.

Before and After Grace:

What is the difference between the condition of man before and after grace? The Lord Jesus Christ came to liberate man from sin and slavery. He carried humanity from eternal death to life, from darkness to light. How then could the commandments of the Old Testament be the same as those of the New Testament? How could God ask man to fulfill the same commandments before salvation, that He demanded after the fulfillment of salvation and renewal?

St. Paul writes, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...”* (2 Cor 5:17). The man who lived under the curse of the Law in the Old Testament could not be required to fulfill the commandments of the New Testament; but the one who was

granted grace, sonship, and renewal is required to meet very superior and holy commandments. The higher standard is required as the greater capacity is given.

In order to be able to fulfill the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ, He gave us the grace of renewal and sonship. He reconciled us with His heavenly Father, and gave us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us. Thus, we are able to fulfill the commandments of perfection. Therefore, Christ said: *"I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."* (Mat 5:17).

We reject the claim that there is a God called the God of the Old Testament, and another called the God of the New Testament. Those who strongly agree with this argument, say that in the Old Testament God asked the people to fight, while in the New Testament He said, *"...love your enemies..."* (Mat 5:44). This is true, but in the Old Testament men were required to fight paganism in order to preserve their existence, while in the New Testament He asks us to fight the devil. They did not have the sword of the Holy Spirit and the word of God; therefore they had to fight with the sword in order to keep themselves as a chosen generation of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's special people. Man had to protect himself from heathen worship, through war.

However, in the New Testament the Lord said, *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."* (Mat 10:16). The man of the New Testament possessed abilities that were completely different. The Lord said, *"...for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist."* (Lk 21:15). He also said, *"You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake."* (Lk 21:12).

Christianity spread, touching the entire world. *"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues;"* (Mk. 16:17). In the Old Testament no person was able to cast out demons. The kingdom of Satan trembled before the power of the gospel, through the preaching of the apostles, whose *"sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world."* (Rom 10:18).

In the Old Testament, God tried to guard and protect his people in a narrow and limited area of land. Their greatest accomplishment was preventing paganism from penetrating their midst. However, in the New Testament the Lord said, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature..."* (Mk 16:15) *"...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Mat 28:20). In the Old Testament, the people of God were confined, but in the New Testament the church spread throughout the entire world, carrying the power of its witness to Christ. In the New Testament, the church is accompanied by the One Who is stronger than death, since the church witnessed the *"...eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us"* (1 Jn 1:2). It no longer feared death.

We should constantly preach the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. We pray in the liturgy saying, *"Amen, Amen, Amen, Your death O Lord we preach. Your holy resurrection and ascension to the heavens, we confess..."*

This is our mission in this world: To spread peace and love, to preach life, and preach the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from among the dead.

May the Lord grant us to be genuine witnesses for His resurrection, and preachers of His gospel.

Glory to God forever. Amen.