

CHAPTER 5

THE HOLY BIBLE

"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls"

(James 1:21)

- A) God's Book**
- B) Blessings of the Bible**
- C) The word in the lives of men of God**
- D) Place of the Holy Bible among our reading**
- E) Why do we study the Holy Bible?**
- F) How to study the Word of God?**
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A) GOD'S BOOK

In spite of the increase in the number of books and published material which appear every day, and in spite of the progress in human knowledge, the **Holy Bible** is still unconditionally number one amongst all of them. It is indeed God's Book and the Book of books.

Naming it "the Holy Bible" is not the deed of man, but of the Holy Spirit the writer of the Book "and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15), ...**"the gospel of God** which He promised before through His prophets in **the Holy Scriptures"** (Romans 1:1, 2). This naming differentiates - without doubt - between the message of God **"the Holy Bible"** and of the other books which men author in different branches of knowledge.

The Holy Bible is God's Book from its beginning to its end. It contains many books, some of which are ascribed to known writers such as Moses, David, Solomon, Matthew, Luke, and Paul. Yet these were not their own writings. **The writer of God's Book, from its beginning to its end is the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of God** "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 Peter 1:20, 21). St. Paul also says **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"** (2 Timothy 3:13).

All those who made an effort to resist the Bible and studied it for the purpose of discrediting it, were either attracted by it or were destroyed by it.

The Holy Bible is in two Testaments: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word "testament" means covenant between God and man. They were also called testaments because they were marked by blood. The Old Testament was marked by the blood of slaughtered animals and the New Testament was signed by the Blood of Christ.

THE ONENESS OF THE BIBLE AND ITS OBJECTIVE:

The Holy Bible is a truly amazing Book. It contains 73 books (46 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament). They were written during a period of 1500 years by about 40 writers of different backgrounds. Among them were kings such as David and Solomon, shepherd Amos, priest Zechariah, prophets such as Samuel and Isaiah, legislator Moses, commander Joshua, fishermen such as Peter and John, scholar Paul and physician Luke. It was written in distinct places such as the Sinai desert, wilderness of Judea, cave of Adullam, a prison in Rome, the island of Patmos, palaces of Mount Zion, shores of the rivers of Babel and in Jerusalem after it was rebuilt. **With all the diversities in the personalities of the writers, the places and the times of writing,**

its 73 books form one book, in spirit, subject and objective. **There is no wonder in this:**

(1) The centre around which the Bible rotates from its beginning to its end is "Jesus Christ the Son of God". The beginning of the Holy Bible tells us that He shall bruise the head of the serpent (the devil) (Genesis 3:15) and at the end of the Bible (the book of Revelation) we read that He is coming quickly, and His reward is with Him, to give to every one according to his work (Revelation 22:12).

The Lord Jesus asserted this fact when He commented to the Jews that their Holy Books "testify of Me" (John 5:39). And in the dusk of the day of His Resurrection "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them (the Disciples of Emmaus) in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27). He again confirmed this fact to His Disciples who were gathering before His Ascension saying "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**" (Luke 24:44).

(2) The heart of the Bible is the ways of God with the people. He approaches them according to His free grace and by raising their hopes in Him. The story of God in all of the Book concerns His coming near man who is hiding from God, where God declares Himself to him and raises his hope in Him. God called to Adam after Adam's fall and said to him "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Man hides away from God wherever he is and in whatever he does, and God looks for man to show him the way of salvation.

In the Holy Bible God appears different from gods in the books of other religions. In other religions, we see that man searches for god. But in Christianity, God searches for man, and that is the beauty of Christianity. Man the imperfect, the sinner, weak in all respects, is unable by himself to reach God the Holy One, without sin Who lives in unapproachable light!!

(3) The Holy Bible teaches us that the grace of God does not reach us directly, but always through a mediator. It teaches us - that in order for us to receive the forgiveness of our sins - that requires the work of atonement and mediation, and that God does not overlook sin.

This principle is displayed in all the Bible from its beginning to its end. **From here we find the Old Testament full of prophecies about the Messiah (Christ) "there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus"** (1 Timothy 2:5). The Gospels show Him present and working, the Epistles look at Him with faith and knowledge and wait for His second coming and the book of Revelation speaks about His authority and His eternal Kingdom.

THE EVERLASTING BOOK:

The Holy Bible is distinguished by its profound effect on the souls of its readers who approach it with faith and humility. It did and still does urge its readers to get rid of their sins, no matter how heavy and complicated they are. For true believers, the Bible is like Samson with all his strength, and for the proud and the unbelievers it is like Samson himself but after he shaved his head and lost his strength!!

In spite of the fact that the Bible has been translated into about 850 languages, it did not lose its power, action and effect. This is due to the secret of its strength; not the eloquence of its words or its attractive style, but to the Spirit which its words contain. The Lord Jesus said "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). It was able to attract millions of hearts to God after it stirred them to repentance, and brought them joy and peace and filled them with hope. There is no wonder in that, as it is a live book, strong, and effective in the souls of those who read it with faith.

In the eighteenth century, **the French philosopher Voltaire said** that twelve men laid the basis of Christianity and that he himself would discredit it. He added that the Holy Bible would be a forgotten book within one hundred years. Yet hundreds of years have passed and nothing that Voltaire anticipated has happened. To the contrary, **the harsh scientific criticism which faced the Bible in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, revolved to detailed study of the Holy Bible, of its history and of all which relates to it. The Bible came out from this dilemma - the dilemma of the new age - stronger than those who criticised it had imagined .**

New archaeological discoveries, linguistic studies and the like served in uncovering the authenticity of the Bible and the truth of its stories in a way the scholars did not foresee.

It is true that the Holy Bible will remain an everlasting book, and not one of its words will ever fail. That is according to the saying of Lord "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" (Matthew 5:18). "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mark 13:31). See Revelation 22:18-19.

B) BLESSINGS OF THE BIBLE

There are uncountable blessings in the Word of God. **We never hear about anybody who lived a holy life, without the Holy Bible being the basis of forming his spiritual life.** We never hear about a faithful minister, a successful missionary, a struggling hero of faith, without the Holy Bible being the secret of his success, the source of his inspiration, his support and his strength.

In the past, God commanded the placing of **the two tablets of the Covenant upon which the Ten Commandments were written by the Fingers of God in the Ark of Testimony,** together with the pot of Manna (Hebrew 9:4). This place is a gentle reference to the heart of the believer where the Word of God is kept, and where the Lord Jesus dwells; the real Manna Who descended from heaven for the life of all the world.

We all know that because of the first fall, the whole of mankind was expelled from Paradise - their original home - to the world where we now live, referred to as a foreign home, in which we are all aliens. This foreign home is full of darkness and mankind is in a constant state of war against his old enemies "the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:11). The Lord explained in His Holy Book that the main help in our sojourn and wars against our enemies is the Word of God. **This principle is utterly clear in the whole Bible. The Bible is:**

(1) Good Tidings of Hope and Comfort:

Mankind has to die as the result of disobedience and transgressions. **Meanwhile the Holy Bible brings to us glad tidings of life and freedom. It calls for sonship, liberation from slavery, cessation of the curse of the Law, descendance of the blessings of the Cross and Resurrection, better life and the fellowship with God.** What a beautiful message which the Bible carries "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:15).

Every fifty years the Jews used to celebrate a year known as the "year of Jubilee" (Leviticus 25:11). They celebrated this year in a splendid way according to the Law. When the horns were blown announcing the beginning of the year of Jubilee, Joy found its way to many broken hearts. The poor who had sold his house or his land out of his hand, got it back, and the person who sold himself as a slave was liberated (Leviticus chapter 25). For this the Psalmist blessed "the people who know the joyful sound" (Psalm 89:15). The joyful sound here refers to the sound of the horns announcing the beginning of the year of Jubilee.

The Holy Bible is the Divine horn which proclaims the coming of "the acceptable year

of the Lord" (Luke 4:19), so that we reown our heavenly home which we lost by sin and disobedience, and regain our freedom after we enslaved ourselves to the power of sin and fell into the hands of Satan.

The Holy Bible not only bring us glad tidings, but it is also a great source of strength and hope, and boosting of the moral spirits.

Among the strongest weapons in the hands of our spiritual enemies, is the spreading among God's people, of the sense of weakness, defeat and surrender. The Holy Bible, on the other hand, rejects such wicked moods and replaces them with faith, complete confidence in the Lord, trust in the hope of His salvation, and that He will come with might, even in the last quarter of the night, for all who wait upon Him.

We read the words of Moses to his people when fear and horror got hold of them "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, ... The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:13, 14). We hear after that about the deeds of the Lord with His people in the bare wilderness in the period of forty years. He supported them with the food of the angels and gave them water from a mute rock. He preserved their clothes and shoes, and gave them victory over nations which exceeded them in number and equipment.

We read about the great works of God with God's fearing men everywhere and in every generation and about His very many promises to them "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Psalm 91:14-16).

We read the words of the Lord of Glory "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). We read about the experience of Paul "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) and "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). We also read about the love of God to sinners and His compassion towards them. Hence we should never lose hope, but rather gain strength and be encouraged.

Life's difficulties are numerous and hard, and because of them many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another (Matthew 24:10). **God gave us His Book to support us in our sojourn, a strong constant comforter. We find it near to us in all times, and can sit listening to it as long as we wish. When troubles surround us, there is no better than God's Word to comfort and encourage us.** There is no real comfort in what the people utter, and as Job said in his misfortunes "Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2).

The Word of God has always been the source of comfort to all of God's people. David says "Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope ... This is my

comfort in my affliction, ... I remembered Your judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself... Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction" (Psalm 119:49, 50, 52, 92).

St. Paul explains this matter by saying "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, **that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope**" (Romans 15:4) ... **He commanded the believers to seek comfort from the Bible by saying "Therefore comfort one another with these words"** (1 Thessalonians 4:18). The source of comfort of God's Word is not only due to its accounts about God's people, their forbearance, patience, and what God did with them, or what it contains from fair meanings, **but to the fact that the words of the Holy Books were written by the Holy Spirit "The Helper"** (John 14:26).

(2) Light and Guidance:

Perhaps the forefront blessings of the Word of God are the moving of the hearts to repentance, whether via reading or hearing it. The few words of **Apostle Peter** which appeared as a sermon on the day of Pentecost, were a source of stirring the hearts of three thousand souls to believe in Christ (Acts Chapter 2). The words of **Apostle Paul** - in prison - were the grounds of affecting, even frightening **Felix the ruler**, though - unfortunately - he lost this chance and sent Paul away (Acts 24:25). **Again by reading the book of Isaiah, the Ethiopia eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians**, and what followed of explanation by St. Philip, was the source of his belief (Acts 8:27-39).

In the past, the Lord said on the tongue of Jeremiah the prophet ""Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord, And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29). **As intense fire makes iron malleable, the Word of God melts hard hearts and as hammers smash the rock, the Word of God affects hearts which are solidified by sin and crushes them by its power.**

Since man is a stranger on earth, he needs a guide to lead him and hold his hand. The Word of God is like the pillar of light which used to lead the children of Israel in the Sinai desert. The Word of God also accompanies us until we enter - not the worldly but the heavenly Jerusalem. It is like the star which directed the Magi and kept going before them "till it came and stood over where the young Child was" (Matthew 2:9). Likewise, the Word of God goes before us, leads us, and delivers us to where Jesus is. It never makes a mistake, and never misleads those who follow it. **Hence we hear the words of the Psalmist "I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me"** (Psalm 119:19). This shows us that the Word of God is the best guide for man in his sojourn.

It warns us when we turn away from the right way "Your ears shall hear a word behind

you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it", whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21). It teaches and instructs us "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). "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 Timothy 3:16, 17).

No wonder that we hear the men of God speak about the Law as a light and a lamp "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). The wise Solomon said "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light" (Proverbs 6:23). St. Peter points to the words of the prophets and says "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed **as a light that shines in a dark place**, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19).

For this reason - to express this fact - our Church lights candles during readings of the Gospel. St. Eronimos (Jerome) from the fourth century said "Lighting candles during the readings of the Gospel, a known custom in the Eastern Churches, is not to disperse the darkness but to express joy while hearing the Gospel, like the lit lamps of the wise virgins, and to fulfil the words of the Psalmist "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105) and the saying of the Wise "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light" (Proverbs 6:23).

(3) A Weapon and a Helper:

The Word of God is a mighty power, nobody comprehends except he who has lived with it and by it and experienced it. The Lord Jesus Who left us an example, that we should follow His steps (1 Peter 2:21) **used this weapon in His argument with Satan who came to tempt Him.** In each of the three temptations, the Lord Jesus answered the devil by saying "It is written ..." (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10) [Compare respectively with (Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, 6,13)]. Blessed is he who keeps the Word of God, as the Word turns into power inside him. Blessed is he who fills his bag with the spiritual arrows which are the Word of God. He is not afraid to meet his enemies, like the young man David who went to meet the mighty Goliath (1 Samuel Chapter 17).

St. Paul described the Word of God as **"living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"** (Hebrews 4:12). The Word enters the depth of the heart and uncovers what is in the soul from evil desires and sinful thoughts. Then it works to eliminate the evil from the soul because it is sharper than a two-edged sword. **The source of the power of the Word - as expressed by St. Athanasius - is God Himself Who dwells in His Words!**

When our teacher St. Paul commanded the Church of Ephesus to "Put on the whole armour of God" that they may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, he mentioned a number of these weapons. He spoke about the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. Though all these weapons are used at the time of war - as passive weapons employed for protection, the Apostle came forward and spoke about an active strong weapon which **"is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"** (Ephesians 6:10-11). The Word of God is like the sword for the fighter by which he slays his enemy.

The influence of the Word of God is well realised in our spiritual striving, as it has the power to bring the soul back to the road of righteousness "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7). **It also has the ability to cleanse us from our deficiencies** as the Lord Jesus said "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). **It even sanctifies the soul** "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

In total, the Word of God builds up our spiritual lives "So now, brethren, I commend you to God **and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up** and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). **It is also able to save our souls** "Receive with meekness the implanted word, **which is able to save your souls**" (James 1:21).

The Word of God girds the lions of our minds. When the thoughts wonder away from God, and start to slide down to the pit of vice, the Word of God does its work and comes forward to awaken the mind and makes it sober. For this St. Peter says "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober" (1 Peter 1:13). **Also our teacher St. Paul says** "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth" (Ephesians 6:14). **Truth is none other than the Word of God** "Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

When the leadership of the Israelites was transferred to Joshua son of Nun after the death of Moses, the Lord commenced His work with Joshua by telling him **"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.** For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8). It is clear from these words of the Lord that they are a direct command; His words shall not depart from our mouths. The reason "that you may observe to do", and the result "you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success".

The Psalmist tells us about a pleasant experience at the forefront of the Psalms "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, ... **But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.** He shall be like a tree planted by the "rivers of water", that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (Psalm 1:1-3). What a pleasant experience of the Psalmist, and what a wonderful resemblance he introduced between the soul which delights in the law of the Lord and a tree planted by the rivers of water. The rivers of water here are the work of the Holy Spirit in

the believer (John 7:38, 39); the Holy Spirit Who wrote the Book.

(4) Measure of Perfection and Growth:

Often a Christian deviates from the proper way, affected by the spirit of the time, tradition and imitation of others. The spiritual values are then distorted in his sight and the measures he uses change according to his moods, imaginations and his subconscious motives. He thinks that his life is not bad as long as he does not commit (big) sins - according to his measure. **But when he resorts to the Book of God - the perfect Book, free from all errors - and judges himself by it and reads for example that God demands a perfect life from all of us, then he discovers his flaws and realises his mistakes.**

We ought to measure everything in the light of the Word "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

When Paul and Silas reached the Jews in Berea and spoke to them about believing in the Lord Jesus **"they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"** (Acts 17:11). **The Holy Bible is like a fine scale,** when measured by it, the weight of our sins is known and we repent. It thus leads us to the road of perfection.

How beautiful is that which King David said "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7). Our teacher St. Paul also said "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 Timothy 3:16, 17).

The Lord Jesus said to the Jews who came to argue with Him "He who is of God hears God's words; **therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God"** (John 8:47). **These words of the Lord explain to us an important aspect of our spiritual lives. We may measure our growth in grace, according to our love to study the Word of God.** As we lose our appetite for the Bread of Life, we are sure that we suffer from a spiritual ill. It may be due to not breathing enough of the refreshing air in the fellowship with God.

This is expressed by what St. John Chrysostom said to his people in one of his sermons "When I see your strong desire and your swiftness in coming here in order to hear the holy teachings, and as I watch your desire and longing for the spiritual food which is the Word of God, I sense your growth in virtue. We rule that the body is healthy when we see it eat food with appetite

and pleasure. Likewise, your hunger for the Word of God, shows us clearly the readiness of your souls and their good health".

C) THE BIBLE IN THE LIVES OF THE MEN OF GOD

We do not know about a single saintly man of God except the Word of God is the basis of his life. We do not know about a single successful minister except the Word of God is the basis of his ministry and from it he was filled and was satisfied and also from it he gave to the thirsty souls. The Word of God was - and is - the spiritual table, from which all the saints feed, whether they are missionaries, ministers, ascetic people, or ordinary believers. They read it day and night. They keep the Word of God and the Word keeps them. They are enlightened by it and it shows them the way, and makes them a light which shines for many.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:

From the beginning, God gave great importance to the Word. He commanded His servant Moses saying "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" (Deuteronomy 6:6-8). Certainly, these words deserve our attention. Let us make from them a measure of our love to the Word of God.

When God started to deal with Joshua who led the people after Moses, His first command to Joshua was about keeping the Word "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8). It is a clear command from God that His Words shall not depart from our mouths and that we strive to do the will of the Lord.

As for David the great, prophet and king, it is very difficult to portray how close he was to the Word of God. All his praises are full of melodies about the Word of God and his love to it. In one of them he says "I delight to do Your will, O my God, **and Your law is within my heart"** (Psalm 40:8). What a big and loving pen which wrote "Your law is within my heart". This deserves deep meditation. **From all of David's psalms, let us consider the everlasting praise, the melody of love to the Word of God; psalm 119.**

Psalm 119 is a unique chapter in the Bible and it is the longest. Nearly each one of its 176

verses contains an expression about the Holy Bible, such as "Your commands", "Your statutes", "Your decrees", "Your rules" and "Your law" etc. **This praise shows us that the believer lives by Word of God all his life:**

It is the secret of his power in the days of his youth "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word" (Psalm 119:9). **It is the meditation of the believer all the day** "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). **It is his meditation through the night also** "My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word" (Psalm 119:148). **It is his comfort for ever** "You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me" (Psalm 119:98). **The Word of God is most dear for him that he cries with joy** "The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver" (Psalm 119:72). Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!" (Psalm 119:127).

David also explained that the study of the Word gives profound delight by saying "I long for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my delight. (Psalm 119:127). **It also gives him a new spirit** "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments" (Psalm 119:131).

That was about David the harp of the spirit. **Solomon the Wise, his son, says** "My son, **keep my words, and treasure my commands within you. Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart**" (Proverbs 7:1-3).

Prophet Jeremiah expressed his desire for the Word of God as if he wanted to eat it "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16). **Again the Prophet Ezekiel** tells us that God shows us by amazing words the power of the Word and its delight "Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel". So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. And He said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you". **So I ate it, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness. And He said to me: "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them"**" (Ezekiel 3:1-4).

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:

In the New Testament our Lord Jesus Christ reveals the place of the Word. In the twelfth year of His Divine Incarnation, He was found sitting in the Temple as a boy Who loves the Word of God, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions (Luke 2:46). And when He accepted to be tempted by the devil, He defeated the devil by the power

of the Word. In every one of the three temptations, Jesus answered the devil by "It is written ...". **He explained to us that the Word is the food for the spirit "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"** (Matthew 4:4) [Compare with Deuteronomy 8:3].

The Word is the proof of His love "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15), "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). **He also tells us that the ignorance of the Word** is a source of making mistakes. He said to the arrogant Jews "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29).

More than that Jesus explained to us that the Holy Books are sufficient and able in their work for the salvation of mankind. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; when the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment, the answer of Abraham was "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them". But the rich man again begged Abraham saying "No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent". This time the answer of Abraham was "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:27-31). **And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him,** "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!". **But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"** (Luke 11:27, 28).

The early Christians were careful in teaching their children the Word of God since their childhood. Our teacher St. Paul pointed to that when he wrote to his disciple Timothy saying "and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). **As for the youth, the Word was the source of their steadfastness and power.** St John wrote to them "I have written to you, young men, **because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one"** (1 John 2:14).

The Epistles in the New Testament are full of verses which show the importance of the Word of God - we referred to that when we spoke about the blessing of the Book. **Finally we see that God shows the importance of the Word** in the book of Revelation as He says "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, **and keep those things which are written in it"** (Revelation 1:3).

All these written commands were reflected in the lives of the saints of the Christian Church. We found that they made a big effort in studying the Holy Bible and we see that they learned by heart many parts of it. The book of Psalms is only one of the beloved holy books which they learned and used in their prayers. We sense this fact clearly in their sayings and their writings, that the word of Christ dwelled in them richly (Colossians 3:16).

D) PLACE OF THE HOLY BIBLE AMONG OUR READING

Published material is on the rise every day, and there is not enough time to read everything we wish to read. Hence one picks up what he can and leaves the rest. There is also big a amount of books, magazines and pamphlets which contain religious knowledge about the Holy Bible, Divinity, doctrine, Church history and the like which many saints and scholars wrote. Yet, without doubt, the Holy Bible surpasses all of them enormously. It is the sun and the rest are none other than dark planets which reflect whatever bright lights falls on them from it. **For this reason it is not at all suitable, at any time, to count on these books without the Holy Bible**, which requires specified times for its study.

Effective sermons, written lessons, periodicals and religious books, cannot by any means replace the personal quiet study of the Word of God. **We make a big mistake when we read the man-made books more than we read the Book of God "Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law" (Psalm 94:12).**

In the past, few people could read, and not many books were published. People used to gather around a reader who owned a copy of the Holy Bible, or some of its books, and listen to him. They listened solemnly and with joy, thanking God for this unique opportunity, remembering the praise of the Lord "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it" (Revelation 1:3).

In our time, the Bible is available to everybody, and those who can read are very many. Yet few are those who come eagerly to satisfy their thirst from the source of the living Book. **The gift of reading is one of the most important gifts for modern man. It is not correct for him to stand in front of the throne of the Lord of Glory in the last day and apologise for not using this gift in studying His nurturing Word.**

When a dear friend sends you a letter, you anxiously open and read it to know the news it contains. You do all that eagerly and joyously. Should such feelings be directed towards Him Who sends you His Holy Scripture in which He entrusts you with glorious mysteries, news and promises full of happiness and joy and carries to you the breeze of comfort and the tune of eternity!! Your feelings should be deserving like the feelings of David who said "For I have chosen Your precepts.

I long for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my delight" (Psalm 119:173, 174).

It is said "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice" (Psalm 51:8) and "A good report makes the bones healthy" (Proverbs 15:30). There are no words which carry glad tidings of salvation more than the Holy Bible. It is food for the spirit and nourishment for the heart.

The followers of Jesus should have specified hours in which they meet their Teacher the Lord Jesus, and His Word should have the priority in our thinking. You should give the Lord the early parts of your time, which are the first hours of the day, because it is difficult to attend to holy thoughts when we become busy with our daily duties. It was necessary for the Children of Israel in the past in the wilderness to collect the Manna before sun rise and the evaporation of the dew. **Likewise we should spend a good amount of time before eating breakfast in a personal loving study to the Bible, in which we collect the spiritual Manna, the food of our souls, as we travel in the wilderness of this world.**

We admit that the morning hour before eating breakfast may not be possible for some due to their circumstances and their work. The good Lord, loving to mankind, knows the circumstances of those sons. He makes special arrangements to meet them some other time during the day. He will give them a full reward as He did with the people of the eleventh hour (Matthew 20:9).

We also know that sufficient personal time to spend in front of God with His Book, may not be possible for everybody to the same degree. Yet the Lord repeats to those people once more the miracle of the Manna. In this, the Divine Revelation is fulfilled "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack" (2 Corinthians 8:15). That is, if due to our compulsory circumstances we can only collect a little of the spiritual Manna, this little we collect will be sufficient for us all day long.

We wish here to attract the attention to our duties towards our children and the Word of God. The Lord commanded His people in the past to teach His Word to their children "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. **You shall teach them diligently to your children, ...** " (Deuteronomy 6:7). "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, ... You shall teach them to your children, ... " (Deuteronomy 11:18, 19). The parents did as they were commanded. For this reason our teacher St. Paul praised his disciple Timothy that since childhood he knew the Holy books, and he referred to the genuine faith that is in Timothy, which dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). We should also accustom our children to listen to the Word of God, and when they learn to read, they study it.

E) WHY DO WE STUDY THE BIBLE

Numerous are our gains from studying the Holy Book of God. The Bible is:

(1) The Book of Salvation:

It is the Book which explains to us the case of the salvation of the human race from sin, and the rise from its fall by means of the redemption which God made for His people, and for the whole world. That happened by the death of His Son Jesus Christ. There is nothing more important than this case. It is the case which deals with the forgiveness of our sins, our salvation and our victory. That is, which deals with either our eternal destruction or our eternal life "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5).

The Old Testament tells us of the works of God with His prophets and with His people, His teachings and His special commands concerning behaviour, worship and faith. He told us with signs and prophecies about His Incarnation. The New Testament tells us about the fulfilment of these prophecies in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord, His holy life in the flesh, His teachings and what concerns this new life.

Accordingly, the Holy Bible contains one connected subject, the story of mankind, which is the basis of religion, the basis of eternal life, the happiness of men and the most important event of our existence. For this reason the Lord of Glory told the Jews who resisted him and who pretended they knew the Holy Books "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39, 40).

The Lord Jesus addresses the Jews by saying "for in them you think you have eternal life", because they used to search them in order to extract from them the ceremonial law, while rejecting from them the teachings about Christ. Were they diligent, they would have found that they testify of

Him. As for us, we search these Holy Books because they carry for us the true message of salvation, and are able to lead us to the source of life, truth and eternal life.

(2) Nourishment for the Spirit:

The body is supported by different material foods, and the spirit is supported by the different spiritual foods, such as prayers, the study of the Word of God, and taking communion from the Holy Flesh and Blood of the Lord.

Among the spiritual foods, some kinds are not easy to get every day. Yet there are two kinds which are considered the daily food for the believer, which are prayer and the Word of God. **By prayer we speak to God, and by studying the Bible He speaks to us. According to St. Ambrose "We speak to Him when we pray and we listen to Him when we read the Holy Books"**. As if these two kinds of spiritual food are the two electric wires which are connected to the source of spiritual power from which we get our daily energy. A current goes from the heart to Him and another one arrives from Him to the heart. That is how we are enlightened.

What happens if someone does not eat his food? He will certainly gradually weaken until he dies. Accordingly, the spirit has its special food, which if it does not receive, it will dry and wither. We spoke earlier about the different blessings of the Bible, and the plan of Satan in his wars with men. He tends to make them neglect the Word of God and its study, in order to deprive them from its blessings. Slowly and gradually, he will be in charge of them. Our teacher David was aware of that and said **"Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction"** (Psalm 119:92).

When we eat food for the body, we do not know exactly how it changes to energy and strengthens our body and gives it the power of life. We still eat and live, as such transformation is overlooked and we feel our strength as we do our duties. **That happens in our spiritual lives. As we feed on our spiritual food, it transfers inside us into spiritual power, whose effect shows in the time of need.** Blessed is the believer who cares to feed his spirit as he cares to feed his body, by giving his spirit its special food which the Lord described "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

(3) Law of the Last Judgement:

Besides being the book of our salvation and our spiritual food, the Holy Bible is also the law by which we and the rest of the world are going to be judged in the last day. The Lord Jesus said "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him-- **the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day**" (John 12:48). St. Paul said **"In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel"** (Romans 2:16).

Hence if we are going to be judged by the Bible, it is better to know it and to live according to its commands. It has described to us some of the scenes of judgement.

F) HOW TO STUDY THE WORD OF GOD

(1) By the Spirit:

The Holy Bible is not an ordinary book or a product of human mind. It is the Book of God produced by His Divine Mind, written by His Holy Spirit. One may read a part of the scriptures and find ordinary words, while another reads the same part and enjoys its sweetness and discovers its amazing depth. **Truly, the Scripture has spiritual profundity and its depth is hidden behind its apparent ordinary words.**

A human eye may be able to read the printed words of the Bible and understand its direct and obvious meanings, in accord with most of the people. But few are able to realise the purpose of God from His Words, and read what is written behind them. **This requires that God opens our eyes in order to see His purpose. David ask the Lord saying "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law"** (Psalm 119:18). Nevertheless, it has been given to the children of God to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11).

When the army of the king of Aram surrounded the city of Dothan in order to capture prophet Elisha, his servant Gehazi arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. He was horrified and said to Elisha "Alas, my master! What shall we do?". So Elisha answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those with them". And Elisha prayed, and said, "**Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see**". Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. **And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire** all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15-17). **The horses and chariots of fire were there from the beginning, but Gehazi could not see any of them until the Lord opened his eyes to see them.**

What happened? The same man and the same eyes could now see what is in front of them which they could not see before! There are superb spiritual meanings and many blessings in the Words of the Lord, but we cannot see them. We need the Lord to open our eyes to see them. **Let us - when we sit in front of the Bible - lift up our hearts in humility and ask Him to open our**

eyes, that we may see wondrous things from His law (Psalm 119:18).

It is not easy to search the depth of the Words of God. Scholars, saints, and ascetic people spent all their lives and did all they can to reach the depths of the Bible, especially its meditating spiritual meanings. None of them at any time could claim that he finished the study of the Bible and understood it. They instead felt that all their efforts are but few drops in a huge expanse of water, and are the first steps in an endless road!!

It is true that the Holy Bible was written for mankind in order that mankind lives with it, yet the Spirit reveals to every diligent person one of the many facets of the Bible. David lived in this experience and he said to God "I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad" (Psalm 119:96). David was given the gift of prophesy, and God testified that his heart is set according to God's heart, and as well David spoke by the Spirit. If David had uttered these words, what could we say?

Indeed, the more we live in fellowship with God, and try to study the Scriptures by the Spirit, the Spirit will reveal to us new meanings, as much as we can sustain. God is willing to give us many blessings, all at once, and show us His mysteries, yet we cannot bear the weight of the Glory of God, nor His many comforts.

For this also David said **"I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart"** (Psalm 119:32). The more we keep the Lord's commands, the more He enlarges our hearts which sin has shrunk - **in order to be able to retain the most amount of His comforts, according to the words of the Lord "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old"** (Matthew 13:52).

No wonder in all what we stated, as the Lord Jesus said **"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life"** (John 6:63). The Words of God are spirit, which we cannot entirely enjoy and understand, except by the Spirit, as He said to the Samaritan woman "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Some may describe the Holy Bible as dry and rigid, and deny all what we said about it. They in fact try to analyze the Bible with their bare minds and try to comprehend the Spirit and the Spirit's mysteries with their own reasons, and hence they fail. **One has to admit that the Bible has attraction even for thinkers. Yet there is a big difference between enjoying the Bible with the mind and enjoying it by the spirit.** According to this measure, there are many aspects of the Bible which we cannot reach with the mind, but we can sense by the spirit. For example:

Mary the sister of Martha sat at the feet of the Saviour conversing and listening to Him. The Bible did not mention her chats with the Lord nor the words of the Lord to her. The Bible

only praised her attitude. Yet by the spirit we can grasp that Divine talk if we give ourselves a place beside Mary at His feet!! The Spirit Who dwells in us, He Himself is the One Who wrote the Holy Bible. He also - according to His promise - will teach us all things, and bring to our remembrance all things that He said to us (John 14:26). St. Paul said "But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him". **But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God"** (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

(2) With Reverence:

One might think that familiarity breeds indiscretion and imprudence in one's dealings. We have been granted great familiarity with the Lord as a free gift, but it is of a different kind. **The free familiarity of sonship which we received does not mean that we behave with no solemnity or fear towards God.** Certainly it is not the slave's fear of his master, but a reverence towards his father who loves him. **The more we grow in our spiritual lives and advance in our fellowship with the Lord, the more is our fear and reverence to Him and His Word.** The increase of our fear of Him and His Word is an indication of our spiritual growth. Obviously we have not reached the spiritual level of David, yet David used to say "**my heart stands in awe of Your word"** (Psalm 119:161).

Reading and listening to the Word of God, should be with complete respect and reverence. We should distinguish between the Word of God and the words of the people. Apostle Paul pointed to the reverence of the believers of the Church of Thessalonica to the Word of God by saying "... when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

As we read the Bible, let us feel that we are in the presence of the Lord. Some people, in their personal study - from their excessive respect to the Word of God - they read the Bible standing. Some other people read it kneeling!!

Great reproof will be for him who disregards a special message sent to him by the country's president, or despises a circular the president issued?! **The Holy Bible is the message of the Heavenly Father to every one of His Children. Our lack of reverence in front of His Word would not be correct.** In the past, the Lord said by the words of the Prophet Malachi "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?" (Malachi 1:6).

Dear brother, beware of any lack of respect, as you study the Word of God. Do not

read it as you are laying down on your bed, or sitting disrespectfully, as if you are reading a newspaper or a tabloid, unless you have to, due to some sickness or the like. God loves us as His sons, and He wants to see His children whom He loves in a state of goodness and virtue. There is a special blessing for him who study the Word of God reverently. In the past, the Lord said by Isaiah **"But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word"** (Isaiah 66:2).

What is said about reading is also said about listening. When God speaks, Heaven listens and all in it listen solemnly. God Himself calls us to listen and pay attention to His Word "Listen to Me, My people; and give ear to Me, O My nation: for law will proceed from Me, and I will make My justice rest as a light of the peoples" (Isaiah 51:4).

Just before reading the Gospel in the liturgy, in the Coptic Church, the deacon alerts the congregation saying "Stand in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel". Then he announces that he is about to read the Words of the Lord and says "Blessed be He who comes in the Name of the Lord, our Lord, our God, our Saviour and our King Jesus Christ the Son of the living God, to Whom is glory for ever Amen".

When Ezra the Priest and Scribe opened the book of the Law to read it to the people "all the people stood up. And they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

... For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved"" (Nehemiah 8:5, 6, 9, 11). This was the state of reverence and solemnity of the people in the shadow of the Commandments and the Law of the animal sacrifices. How much should our respect and reverence be when we read and listen - in age of the covenant of grace - the Word of God Who loved and saved us and sealed His covenant by His Holy Blood!!

(3) With Humility:

We spoke earlier about studying the Word of God in the spirit, and we said: Let us - when we sit with the Bible - lift up our hearts in humility and ask Him to "open our eyes, that we may see wondrous things" (Psalm 119:18). **Truly, God does not reveal His mysteries except to the humble "You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes"** (Matthew 11:25). He means here the wise and prudent in their own sight, and by the babes He means the humble.

When we plan to read the Bible, let us prepare our minds. Let us leave every earthly engagement, cross ourselves with the sign of the Holy Cross, and lift up our hearts to God asking Him to bless this opportunity and sanctify our minds. We acknowledge to Him our

ignorance and our short sighted minds. No doubt that God will respond and work "**Receive with meekness the implanted word**, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). Let us beware not to depend on our minds alone in understanding what is unclear. Relying on the mind alone made many people fall and created heresies. If we find difficulties in understanding an issue, we consult recognized commentaries of authors known to have an orthodox faith, and known to be gifted in this area.

We have to mention here that the Holy Bible was written for the common man, and not as a special book for cultured people for example. Yet it contains issues and expressions difficult to understand and need proper explanations from well trusted scholars who have healthy faith and correct doctrine. **Pointing to the Epistles of St. Paul, St. Peter says "in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures"** (2 Peter 3:16). This was what happened concerning St. Paul's writings during his lifetime. More is thus expected in our times!!

We say sorrowfully that this is what actually happened. Some people gave themselves the right to explain the Bible, on their own merits, ignoring the commentaries of the Church fathers and her saints. They leaned on their own knowledge and understanding, lead by the mind only, and disaster struck. **Different heresies and many denominations and factions were created which dissected the body of Christ, the Church, into pieces, and the world was denied the blessings of the one united Church.**

(4) By the Command of the Holy Spirit:

Nobody is able to explain to you the meaning of a certain article better than the author of that article, or a poem better than the versifier who wrote it, and so on. Accordingly, **if you want to know the Holy Bible well, ask the direction of the Holy Spirit Who commanded the saintly men of God to write it.** The Lord Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will teach us all things and bring to our remembrance all things that Jesus said to us (John 14:26). "For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10). Direct your heart to Him and tell Him "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18).

The simple hearted believer who depends on God and the help of the Holy Spirit, finds in the Bible treasures which the wise and prudent cannot find. Apostle John said "You do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things" (1 John 2:27). By the anointing here he means the anointing of the Holy Spirit which we have received in the sacrament of anointment after the sacrament of baptism.

I hope that we do not understand from the words of the Apostle "You do not need that anyone teach you" that each person depends on himself and on his own knowledge in

understanding the Bible. Again before we dealt with the point of "command of the Holy Spirit", we mentioned studying the Word of God with humility, and among the aspects of humility is not trusting in our own mind and our own knowledge "Lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

It was mentioned about St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople that a young man complained to him about a certain matter. The Patriarch asked the man to meet him in his room in the Patriarchate. The man went twice to see the Patriarch but was told by the servant that his master was busy and cannot see him. Then one day the Patriarch asked his servant if the young man came to see him and was astonished to hear the servant's reply "Yes he came twice, but I send him away, because I found you busy writing in your room, with someone else sitting beside you dictating you". At that time the Patriarch was busy writing commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul. The Patriarch asked his servant to describe to him that person whom he found sitting beside him in the room. The servant mentioned that he never saw him before, but he looks like the picture hanging on the wall which was of Apostle Paul. **The Patriarch nodded his head, because he realised what was happening. St. Paul himself was coming to assist the Patriarch in writing his commentaries!!**

(5) For Personal Benefit:

Among the means which help enjoy the Holy Bible, is studying it for one's personal benefit. If you as a minister, are studying a subject in the Bible useful for the ministry, let your main goal be to benefit yourself and to enjoy the Bible. Then you can benefit others and fill them. Do not study the Bible in a fragmented way. Consuming big amounts of food between long periods of time will not help a hungry person to be filled!! **If you sit with the Bible, do not leave it before you fill yourself with this living bread.**

When you read the Bible, try to receive a personal message from God. Try during the reading to pause every now and then and ask yourself this question "What does God want from me by these words?" Be like Samuel when he was in the temple, in that reverent place and the quietness of the night when he opened his mouth and said "Speak (Lord), for Your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:10). Let us listen carefully to what the Mouth of the Lord says and to all what He wants us to understand.

You should feel that the Bible is a personal message from your Heavenly Father to you. Do not consider it a general message to all mankind, with you as one of them. True, it is so, but there is a vast difference between a believer who feels that **Christ suffered and died for his sake**, and another who feels that he is one person among millions of men who enjoyed the privileges of salvation!!

This point was clear in the life of Apostle Paul, as we hear him say "**The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me**" (Galatians 2:20) and "In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, **according to my gospel**" (Romans 2:16). Again there is a big difference for an alien when he reads the news about his country in a news paper, and when he reads a special message sent to him from his father!! We should consider the words of the Bible as a special message for each one of us.

Try to make use of all opportunities which the Bible gives you and to cling to all its promises. If for example you read a promise about the mercy of God to sinners, or a good deed with a lost person, lift up your heart and ask for the mercies of God and a similar deed with you. If you read about a person to whom Jesus humbled Himself and stayed in his home, open your heart and insist in demanding that He dwells in your weak temple, and so on. **The Lord wants you to ask him in confidence and persistently. He blames us saying "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full"** (John 16:24).

Study your Bible regularly, and do not think that it contains some interesting books and other boring books, as "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 ever good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Study from it a sufficient amount every day. It would be even better if you specify a certain amount of reading which would be the lower limit, upon which you increase the amount whenever a chance arrives.

Perhaps the personal benefit becomes complete when we combine reading the Bible with studying it. Let for each of us be a note book in which he writes down the thoughts which come to him during his readings. One would attempt to comprehend the chapters and compare between the different points he wrote "Comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:13). It would be useful to underline the important verses in the Bible, and the like. Do not read the Bible superficially for your blessings only. Reading by itself is useful and beneficial, but studying it is necessary for getting a filling nourishment.

G) METHODS OF STUDYING THE BIBLE

There are various ways for studying the Bible, and individuals and groups like certain ways which they feel comfortable with and which suit their aims and possibilities in their study. We here present some methods as examples. Maybe some will find what is suitable of them whether continuously or for a period of time.

(1) Perhaps the most known method is that which follows some spiritual principles, which we explained earlier. In this method one lifts up his heart by prayer to God before and after the study. One then studies by the spirit of reverence, learns by heart some verses and make some comparisons between different issues.

In this method, when we start one chapter, it is better to review in our minds the contents of the preceding few chapters and the verses which we learned from them. When we finish studying this new chapter, we review its contents and learn from it by heart one or more verses. We end by lifting up our hearts to God. **This method is suitable for individuals, families or small groups.**

(2) Some people study the Bible while referring to commentary books, as well as writing down their own selected remarks. Some of those people keep a note book in which they write down some chosen verses, questions or comments. Some of them rebind their personal Bible after inserting an empty sheet of paper between every two printed pages of the Bible, on which they write comments in front of the selected verses.

(3) Some people like to add to the above methods, practical exercises from their readings. In the morning one studies a small portion of the Bible from which he chooses a certain point, or a verse and makes from it a subject to apply in his life during the day. When he returns home in the afternoon, he gives account to himself to how successful his exercise was, and asks for God's help to continue the exercise for the rest of the day. He accounts for himself again in the evening.

Some people like to choose from what they read in a certain day of the week - such as Sunday for example - a subject which they apply in their lives all that week. They prefer not to change the exercise daily, so as to get the maximum benefit from that exercise. Some people like to write down the points which may form a subject of a practical exercise which correspond to what they study. Then they practice these exercises one after the other.

(4) Some people accompany the study with prayer and meditation, and specify a certain time for that, which what should be. They pray first, then they study the Bible a verse at a time, in a meditating way. When they meet a point which touches their hearts, they reflect on it and lift up their hearts asking God to deepen its effect in their hearts. They learn by heart what they can, and move on.

Many people have benefited from this method and for some it is the method they always use. It also helps if one applies this method during certain times in the year, such as the mid-term vacation, week ends or on Sundays. Some youth apply this method of study in summer holidays, and spend long times every day practising it. Such summer holidays are of lasting benefit, and they retain many blessings from them. Some of those youth study the Bible individually and meet every day to discuss in a humble way, what they learn. By this means they form a Christian group with strong ties between themselves and with God.

(5) The subjective method of studying the Bible. Besides the spiritual preparation before reading the Bible, one writes down his notes on a specific subject such as prayer, purity, faith, love, service, ... etc, to study such subject during his reading. On every point in the subject one writes down all the verses in the Bible related to such point. After writing down these notes, one focuses his thinking in them. Such a method is useful, beneficial, fruitful and easy to apply.

(6) Group study. A certain part of the Bible is read by individuals separately. Then they meet together to listen to the questions of one after the other and comment on them. Or they meet to meditate on some of the points of what they studied separately. One of them who had prepared the subject leads the study.

One of the group methods, is to sit together where one reads a chapter of the Bible, and asks the members of the group to give their opinions or ask their questions and hear the answers. At the end, one member comments on the subject. In this method some members of the group may express some wrong opinions. Yet it is better to hear such opinions and correct them in the meeting.

It is important in these group methods, that a person should not give his opinion, every time he wishes to do so, else the others may think that he has the gift of teaching and that it is easy to comment on the Bible verses. Rather, one should ask quietly and discuss openly and to the point, remembering that he is in the presence of the Holy God and that he needs to be instructed, not to instruct. It is also important for the person who leads the group, to be a spiritual person, who has a correct understanding of the Bible, and is well versed in different religious subjects.

H) THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE BIBLE

The Coptic Church devotes great care to the reading and studying of the Holy Bible, as is obvious in all facets of her worship. She is a live example to her children in this respect. She instructs them to **pray the hourly prayers (the Agbia) daily**, and she does that herself in her public worship. **The hourly prayers contain selected psalms from the book of Psalms, which suit the hour of prayer.** It is known that the Book of Psalms is full of prophesies about our Lord Jesus. Also each of these prayers contains a reading from one of the Gospels.

The chants which precede raising of incense on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings and in the Holy Eucharists, are selected parts of the Bible, chanted in a special and lovely way.

The prayers of the Holy Eucharist from its beginning to its end constitute different parts from both the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. There are also **the three teaching readings** in every liturgy. They are a **selection from one of the Epistles of St. Paul**, another one from the **Catholic letters**, and a third one from the **Book of Acts**. After that a portion from one of the four gospels is read.

Before each of the above mentioned four readings, the choir introduces the reading with verses from the Bible, a praise for God. The priest chants the prayer of the Gospel, and says "O Master, Lord Jesus Christ our God, Who said to His saintly, honored disciples and holy Apostles, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which you see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things which you hear and have not heard them. But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear"". These are the same words which the Lord uttered to His disciples (Matthew 13:16, 17). Preaching the congregation follows the reading of the gospel and is based on the read gospel.

All around the year, the Church selects special readings from the Bible which assert the different commemorations. Vivid examples are the chants of the Coptic month of "Kiahk", which precedes Christmas, and the readings of the Pascha (the holy week) which precedes Easter. The readings in the holy week are from very many books of the Bible, and they all speak about the Lord Jesus in the last week of His life on earth. On Good Friday, as we remember His crucifixion, the Church concentrates all the readings on the suffering of the Lord. She reads parts from both the Old and the New Testaments. The Church keeps awake all that night until the morning of the next day (Saturday), chanting different praises from the Old Testament. Then she reads the whole book of Revelation, with chanting whose words are excerpts from the same book.

The other ceremonial prayers of the Church, such as in baptisms, weddings, deaths and anointing of the sick, ..., all of them without exceptions are excerpts from the Holy Bible.

The Coptic Church encourages personal study of the Bible, and regards that as an effective means of grace, and an essential daily spiritual food.

The Coptic Church is different from the Roman Catholic Church. The latter denied the Holy Bible to her children and used to lock the Bible in the churches during the Middle Ages, so that nobody could read it. Until now the Roman Catholic Church does not allow anyone of her children to read the Bible, except in very limited cases, and after the person takes permission from the priest who tells him what to read.

I do not forget what happened once between myself and a spiritually mature Roman Catholic person. A long time ago, before I became a monk, I went to a Catholic book store which sold "the Jesuit fathers version" of the Holy Bible, and this person heard that I wanted to buy a Bible. He asked in astonishment "What do you want the Bible for?". I answered "to read it". He asked me if I go to church and hear the sermon of the priest, and I answered "yes". He continued by saying that in this case I do not need the Bible, as I hear the priest whose mouth utters the law, so the Lord said. I said to myself "What a difference between our Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic one".

We are unable here to portray in a detailed way, **how the Coptic Church is a biblical Church which extracts from the Holy Bible all her prayers, and practices in her worship.** From that she intends to attract her children to the Bible and encourage them to benefit from it in all aspects of life. We hope that one day an enthusiastic member of the Church will conduct a research which will present that in detail.