

## Examples of Cruciformity

### **5. Bishara Awad** "A Well-Aimed Stone"

Following is a shortened revision of Chapter 13 from *Light Force* by Brother Andrew.<sup>1</sup> ("A dramatic new mission for *God's Smuggler*")

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In 1948, Bishara Awad's father was caught in the crossfire between the Jordanian and Israeli soldiers and died on the street in front of their Jerusalem home. The next day neighbours buried his body in a nearby courtyard. At midnight, a Jordanian soldier ordered the family to evacuate and promised to tell them when they could return. The family left in whatever clothes they wore and joined the procession toward the Old City. Just inside the Damascus Gate, a Muslim family took them in, provided blankets and food, and allowed the eight refugees to sleep in a storage room. The Awad family never saw their home again.

Bishara's mother found a job as a nurse for twenty-five dollars a month, but it wasn't enough to feed and provide for seven children. To ensure that her children would have an education, she placed all but the oldest in orphanages. Bishara, nine years old, and his two brothers were placed in a school and orphanage a few blocks outside the Old City. It was a miserable existence. Many nights they went to sleep hungry.

The boys were allowed to visit their home once a month. For Bishara, times with his mother were precious. Her faith greatly influenced him and each of his siblings. "Always show the Lord to everybody," she would say; "It is never right to take revenge." He never forgot that, even after going to the United States to study. His mother, of course, couldn't afford to send him to college, but she had prayed; and, miraculously, he obtained a full scholarship to attend a Wesleyan university in South Dakota.

While pursuing a master's degree in education, war disrupted his life again. The Six Day war of 1967 allowed Israel to gain control of Gaza, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem. Those Palestinians who were not physically home during the conquest were prohibited from returning to their land. Thus Bishara was separated from his family and the land of his birth. The only way he could return was to become an American citizen. Finally, with U.S. passport in hand, Bishara returned to the Holy Land under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee, as principal of Hope Secondary School for boys located in Beit Jala, a town adjacent to Bethlehem.

His parents had provided a strong Christian influence, which Bishara wanted to impart to his students. What he saw in the boys at the school disturbed him deeply. The conflict in Israel was leaving scars on these children. Many had lost one or both parents. Others had been separated from their parents during the confusion of the '67 war and didn't even know if they were dead or alive. Many of the teenagers wet their beds at night. Both the boarders and day students displayed anger and violent behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, *Light Force: A Stirring Account of the Church Caught in the Middle East Crossfire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2004) 103-107

As principal, Bishara tried to impart to these troubled kids the messages his mother had often preached—to love God, love your neighbors, and love your enemies. But these boys weren't responding. They would sit in chapel sessions and listen to Bishara's messages, but none had turned their own hearts to God. He could see their hatred on the playground as they role-played revenge against Jewish soldiers. "Why, Lord?" Bishara prayed out loud. "Why are there no results? Why would You bring me back to my homeland and not use me?" The silence seemed to accuse him.

He walked the halls, past the room where the boys slept. Many of them tossed and turned fitfully, groaning or talking in their sleep. He wondered about their dreams, which no doubt reflected their private pains. Each of them had experienced harassment from Israeli soldiers. It wasn't unusual for the kids to be ordered to empty their schoolbags, have their books thrown on the ground, and then be ordered to pick them up. Feeling humiliated and powerless to do anything effectively, many students had thrown stones at the soldiers and carried their defiance of authority over to the teachers at the school.

Bishara walked out the back door of the school building and stood under the night sky. A near-full moon illuminated Elah Valley below. This was the location where, according to many Bible experts, David had fought and defeated Goliath. In his mind Bishara could almost see the armies—the Philistines camped on the western hill, the Israelites on the east—and the nine-foot giant advancing to taunt the troops under King Saul's command. And he could see little David boldly confronting him.

Unfortunately, Bishara realized he was on the wrong side. As he "heard" the taunts of the giant, he recognized his own voice. The Philistine verbalized the emotions he'd repressed for so long. Hatred welled up in him as Goliath cursed the Jews. Bishara blamed the Israelis for the death of his father and the loss of his home in 1948. He blamed them for the twelve years he'd lived in an orphanage, separated from his mother. He blamed them for the years of exile in the United States. For so long the hatred had festered, mostly below his consciousness. Now he recognized that same hatred in the boys under his care. It was destroying them, and he was powerless to help them unless he, their principal, conquered his own anger and bitterness.

Tears welled up in his eyes. How could he, a man who had given his life to Jesus Christ a dozen years before, who was committed to be an instrument of God in the Holy Land, help these angry young boys? There was only one answer. His voice broke the silence of the night: "Lord, I beg You. Forgive me for hating the Jews and for allowing that hatred to control my life."

With every ounce of his being, Bishara meant that prayer. Looking again over the valley, he could imagine the brave shepherd David charging Goliath, swinging the slingshot, and toppling the giant with a single, well-aimed stone. Bishara's prayer was an equally well-placed stone. It almost seemed too easy as he felt the giant of hatred fall before him. He sensed God's presence enveloping him, and the frustration, hopelessness, and hatred were washed away, replaced with love.