

Examples of Cruciformity

16. Rami

A conversation in Gaza City included in *Light Force*¹; the authors, Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, are interviewing a young Arab named Rami.

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Later that evening, we met the young man who had so captured our attention as he sang at the outreach event. Very quietly, speaking through an interpreter, Rami told how his childhood ended when he was nine years old, during the first intifada. "We were a poor family, but it was a big family, a strong family. My brother Kader, who if he were still alive would now be thirty-two years old, was very smart. He was working selling gold."

But Kader, Rami's hero, was killed at the age of eighteen. There was a demonstration near the market—young men and boys were throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers. On his way to buy groceries, Kader was caught up in the demonstration. He picked up a rock and heaved it, hitting the captain on his helmet. Immediately several soldiers chased after him. Kader tore down one of the dirt side streets, chose a house at random, and hid under a bed—there was no other place to hide.

The soldiers had no problem finding the boy. Rami could picture the horror as they began to beat his brother with sticks. "Stop!" said one of the commanders. He handed them a large empty sack. "Put this over him so we don't get splattered with blood." Then they continued the beating. . . While beating him, the soldiers demanded to know his religion. When he replied, "Christian," they hauled him outside to a jeep and tied him cruciform on the hood, then paraded him through the streets of Gaza. When they finally arrived at the military headquarters, he was dumped on the cement floor. "He needs medical attention," someone said. But no doctor was allowed to look at him. The boy died on that floor.

"A blackness entered my heart" Rami said of that incident. Within months, his mother became ill and died. Then another brother started attacking soldiers with Molotov cocktails. He was arrested and imprisoned for five-and-a-half years. "I had a huge anger in me. I needed someone bigger than me to help me contain this kind of anger. No one cared for me after this time. I became lonely. My father became very weak. I had to stay with him. I cleaned him, fed him, took care of him. But I was very angry, because my father wasn't with me to encourage me and because I wasn't with my friends."

Rami determined he would find a way to get even with those who had murdered his brother and were responsible, in his mind, for the death of his mother. He was finishing high school when his father died. He failed the compulsory tests that are required if one wants to attend college. He started drinking alcohol. "I was born into a worldly lifestyle out of a womb of sadness," he said. What a profound statement! I thought.

Rami knew he needed help and took the first steps when a Catholic priest encouraged him to study and retake the tests, then helped him learn to be a secretary, and found him a

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1 Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, *Light Force: A Stirring Account of the Church Caught in the Middle East Crossfire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2004) 282-285 "A Dramatic New Mission for God's Smuggler"

job at the Ministry of Antiquities.

"I know you weren't a Muslim, but were you ever drawn to groups like Hamas or Islamic Jihad?" Al asked.

"I wanted to kill Jews. I thought about becoming a Muslim."

"What prevented you?"

"I didn't know anything about my Christian religion." He admitted there was a huge spiritual gap in his life. In the summer of 2001 he attended a conference called Summerland, "Just because I was bored." It was sponsored by Gaza Baptist Church. "I went each day. On the third day, the Lord was speaking to me through the Holy Spirit. That was when I accepted the Lord Jesus, and my life changed."

"Please, tell us how your life changed," Al prompted.

"Even though I accepted the Lord, there was still some of that blackness in my heart toward the Jews. There were inner battles. I began to study the Word of God. I started going to church. My life began to change little by little. Then I read in the Bible, 'Love your enemies. Pray for them and bless those who persecute you.' I got angry. I closed the book. It was very hard, very hard."

That was when he met Abu Yahya, the manager of The Teacher's Bookshop who worked closely with Pastor Hanna and was a member of Gaza Baptist Church. "He's the one who helped me grow in my relationship with the Lord. He taught me how to love people. He told me, 'You have to pray.' I prayed many long nights that I would be able to accept the Jews. One day (less than a year ago) I wanted to go visit my sister in Jerusalem. I had to get permission from the Israeli government. I went. I was very upset, uptight. But I was praying. Then I saw the soldiers with their big weapons. The first soldier, I saw his face, and there was light. I knew I loved him. He searched me strongly. But I was happy. In my heart there was peace. They sat me on a chair. Strongly. I was looking at all of them. I wanted to tell them that I want to kiss you, to all of them."

Al grinned. "Arabic style, on the cheek!" he said. Rami smiled and nodded. This was the power of the gospel. This was the hope for the Middle East. One man's heart, filled with hate, was replaced with a new heart, one filled with the love of God.

"Where do you go from here? Has God showed you what you are to do with your life?"

"I want to be a man of God. I'm knocking on doors. Maybe a pastor—no, a minister not a pastor. I want to be a great Christian. The Lord wants to shape me so that I could preach the Word of God to all the world, to the Muslims, Jews, Christians."

"Your testimony is a picture of what I believe is the only solution for this area," I said to Rami. "It's a picture of what God can do, but each individual needs to allow God to do it."

Later, after Rami left, Al and I reflected again on how the light had almost gone out in the Baptist church a few years ago. Now, with the evangelistic outreach and young converts like Rami, there was hope that the light would grow brighter. Then there would be less darkness, less despair, less violence.