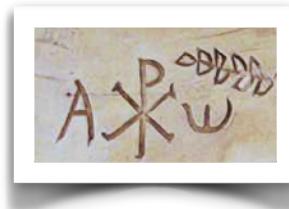


THE POWER OF THE HOLY CROSS WAS REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- 1) The first time the image of the Holy Cross appeared was in Paradise, where it is referred to as the tree of life. Concerning this “tree of life,” Saint John Chrysostom says the following: “There were three different types of trees in Paradise. The first was given to Adam so he could live: **‘And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying, ‘You may eat food from every tree in the garden (Gen. 2:16).’** The second one was given to Adam so he could live well: **‘But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat; for in whatever day you eat from it, you shall die by death’ (Gen. 2:16-17).** And the third one was given to him so he could live eternally: **‘In the middle of the garden was the tree of life’ (Gen. 2:9).**” St. John Chrysostom goes on to say the following: “Adam had the ability to live from that which had been permitted to him to eat. And he would have lived well had he eaten only from that which he had been permitted and had he avoided that which had been forbidden. Furthermore, the tree of life had been placed in the center of Paradise as a reward for him; whereas the tree of the knowledge had been set as a contest, as an exercise. Had Adam kept the commandment, he would have received the reward. Adam, however, disobeyed and died. Thus God, in His love, proceeded to exile Adam from Paradise lest he eat from the tree of life in his state of spiritual death and subsequently permit “evil to become everlasting.”
- 2) The rod that Moses used to part the Red Sea was symbolic of the Holy Cross: **“Then the Lord said to Moses... ‘Now lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it” (Ex. 14:15).** The Orthodox Church, through Her hymnology, further elucidates that Moses actually used his rod to make the sign of the cross over the Red Sea. First, by running it through the water, he formed the vertical line of the cross and thus parted the sea to the left and to the right; in following, he moved his rod from one side to the other, forming the horizontal line of the cross and thus bringing the waters together once more. This is how Saint John of Damascus describes it in his 1st Ode of the Katavasia sung on September 14th during the feast day of The Elevation of the Holy Cross: *“Inscribing the invincible weapon of the Cross upon the waters, Moses marked a straight line before him with his staff and divided the Red Sea, opening a path for Israel to walk through. Then he marked a second line across the waters and united them in one, submerging the chariots of Pharaoh. Therefore let us sing to Christ our God, for He hath been glorified.”*

3) The tree that God showed to Moses, which transformed the bitter waters into drinkable, fresh water in order quench the thirst of the Israelites was certainly an indicator of the Holy Cross: “**Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore he named that place Bitterness. Then the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet”** (Ex. 15:23-25)

4) A vivid symbol of the power of the Holy Cross is found in the book of Exodus. “**So Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose for yourself some mighty men and go out, and set the army in array against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.’** And so it was, when Moses held up his hands, that Israel prevailed; but when he let down his hands, Amalek prevailed. Now Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Then Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people” (Ex. 17:9-11). Here Moses is seen on the peak of the mountain with his arms stretched out, and being held on one side by Aaron, and on the other side by Hur, thus forming the image of the cross, and prefiguring the crucifixion of Jesus Christ Who stretched out His arms upon Golgotha. Noteworthy is that as long as he remained in the form of a cross, the Israelite army would prevail over its enemies. Saint Ephraim the Syrian, when asked why the letters A (alpha) and Ω (omega) are often placed underneath the left and right horizontal members of the cross, replied thus: “When Moses stretched out his hands forming the image of the Cross, and supported by Aaron and Hur, he vanquished Amalek. Since the letter A signifies the beginning, whereas the letter Ω signifies the end, we understand this to be symbolic of the Crucified Jesus. (Note: in the Greek text of the Old Testament, the name Aaron also begins with the letter A as in English, whereas the name Hur is spelled Ωρ and begins with the Greek letter Ω).



An inscription of a Cross bearing the Alpha-Omega symbol discovered in one of the Roman catacombs

5) Another clear image of the Holy Cross is the wooden pole upon which the bronze serpent was hung by Moses in the desert. **“So the Lord sent venomous serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the children of Israel died. Then the people came to Moses, and were saying, ‘We sinned, for we spoke against the Lord and against you; therefore, pray to the Lord, and let Him take away the serpent from us.’** So Moses prayed for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a serpent for yourself and put it on a signal pole; and it shall be, if a serpent should bite someone, when the one bitten looks at it, he shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a signal pole; and it happened when a serpent bit anyone, and he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (Numbers 21:6-9). The wooden pole erected vertically, and the bronze serpent hanging from it horizontally formed the figure of the Cross. Additionally, it symbolized not only the power of the Cross, but the power of faith in Christ Who would hang on the Cross. Everyone who, after being bitten by the snakes, looked upon the bronze serpent would be healed; and everyone who is bitten by the venomous snakes of sin and looks upon and believes in the crucified Jesus Christ is healed from sin and does not die. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself confirmed this: **“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, in the same manner the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”** (Jn. 3:14-15).

6) An unmistakeable depiction of the Holy Cross is seen during the sacrifice of Isaac. The account states that Isaac carried wood on his back as he made his way to the spot where he would be sacrificed, and was then placed upon this very same firewood. **“So Abraham took the firewood of the whole burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son... So the two of them went together. They came to the place where God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the firewood in order; and he bound Isaac his son hand and foot and laid him on the altar upon the firewood”** (Gen. 22:6-9). Isaac being led to a sacrifice while carrying wood on his own back is a vivid typology of Jesus Christ, who carried the Venerable Cross on the path to His Crucifixion.

7) The thicket from which the sacrificial ram was hung served as an exact representation of the Holy Cross. **“Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him a ram was caught in thicket Sabek by its horns. So he brought it for a whole burnt offering in the place of his son”** (Gen. 22:13). In the former instance we have the wood called “Sabek” (i.e. the wood of forgiveness) with a sacrificial ram, and in the latter we have the wooden Cross with the lamb of God.

8) The wood referred to by the prophet Jeremiah in the following verse, “**For I did not know I was like an innocent lamb led to be sacrificed. They plotted an evil device against me, saying, ‘Come, let us put wood in his bread, and destroy him root and branch from the land of the living, so his name might not be remembered any longer’**” (Jer. 11:18-19), is none other than the Holy Cross. The innocent lamb that was led to be sacrificed is our Lord Jesus Christ. “Bread” refers to the body of Jesus Christ, as the Lord stated, “**I am the bread of life**” (Jn. 6:35). And they who plotted against Christ decided to crucify Him upon the wooden Cross. This is why they said: “let us put wood in his bread, and destroy him.”

9) The wood that was cast into the Jordan river by the prophet Elisha, and which retrieved the submerged axe head from the bottom of the river depicted the Holy Cross, through which the human race was pulled out of Hades: “**But as one man was cutting a log, the iron axe head fell into the water. He cried out and said, ‘Alas, master, it was borrowed.’ So the man of God said, ‘Where did it fall?’ And he showed him the place. So he broke off a stick of wood and threw it in the water at the same place; and the iron axe head rose to the surface.** (4 Kings 6:5-7)