

A Patristic Commentary



THE BOOK OF 2 Chronicles

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

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THE SECOND BOOK OF THE CHRONICLES

A commentary by

FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

Translated to English by

Dr. George Botros

AN INTRODUCTION

SEEKING THE FACE OF THE HEAVENLY KING

Some of us may disregard studying the second book of the chronicles on the assumption that it is a repetition of what came in the two books of the kings; Yet it is actually a divine storehouse that provides us with precious treasures.

The second book of the chronicles came as a natural extension of the first book of the chronicles in the following ways:

- 1- The prophet David departed from this world with an exultant heart; Having been a man of praise since his youth and probably since his childhood, he used to find pleasure in singing his psalms while shepherding his father's sheep; as though partaking of the exultant life of the heavenly hosts. And behold, his son Solomon will build the temple, the house of praise and worship.
- 2- The prophet David departed from this world, after dedicating the whole kingdom, and all his possibilities to fulfill his heart's desire to build a house

for the Lord. And behold, here he delivers the throne to his son Solomon, with the only goal to fulfill the divine promise to him, that his son will be the one to build the temple.

- 3- The first book of the chronicles starts by Adam and Eve, receiving the garden of Eden to enjoy an almost heavenly life in a beautiful world created by God for them and their descendants. But, unfortunately, they and their descendants soon corrupted that beautiful world. Then the descendants of Adam got the divine promise of the reform and renewal of everything they corrupted, realized by the Creator Himself, as the Savior of mankind. And the book ends with the death of David, whose heart's desire was to set a holy place for the ark of the covenant, as a sign of the divine presence among the people. And behold, the second book of the chronicles starts with Solomon, who was only preoccupied with building the temple as a center of the whole earth, to proclaim the divine presence.
- 4- If the first book of the chronicles has brought us forth into an enjoyable journey from Adam to David, to confirm that the Son of David is going to come for the sake of the salvation of the whole mankind or of the whole world, the second book concentrates upon David's household, to exhort all believers to call the Son of David to dwell among them, as well as in their hearts. It is the book of the blessed kingdom of God in our life.

The first book shows that our Lord Jesus is the true King who is alone worthy of our worship, exhorting us to follow the lead of king David, the man of prayers and praise, and not to follow that of king Saul. The second book, on the other hand, exhorts us to seek the divine King, the Son of David, to enjoy the fellowship with him, and to set a house for Him inside us (7: 14; 14: 4, 7; 15: 2, 4, 12, 13, 15; 17: 4; 19: 3; 20: 3; 22: 19; 31: 21; 34: 3 etc.).

THE KINGDOM OF DAVID'S HOUSEHOLD:

In our study of the first book of the chronicles, we saw how the devil did not cease to oppose king David and his household, together with the people of Judah, after the dissent of the kingdom of Israel, in an attempt to put off that shining lamp; but the grace of God worked on keeping the royal seed of David's household, until the coming of the Son of David in the fullness of time, to reign in the hearts of the believers, and to grant them His righteousness.

The present book starts with the reign of Solomon, the builder of the house of the Lord; then follows up the history of the kings of Judah, after the dissent of ten tribes, at the beginning of the reign of Rehoboam the son of Solomon; and proceeds until the captivation of Judah to Babylon, then their return after seventy years of captivity.

The book started by the kingdom in the climax of its glory, greatness, and riches; a kingdom that surpassed all the four kingdoms prophesied by the prophet Daniel, in his interpretation of the statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar; the four kingdoms which started by Nebuchadnezzar; as said to him by Daniel: "*You are this head of gold*" (Daniel 2: 38), survived for about seventy years, to be followed by the kingdom of Persia and Media for as long as 130 years; then the kingdom of the Greeks, divided into four branches, which lasted for 300 years; then the kingdom of the Romans that lasted for 300 years.

David, the prophet and the king was a greater hero than all those; and Solomon was a king of great glory among the nations and peoples. The household of David remained on the throne for more than four centuries. Then, after a long eclipse, that kingdom shone again by the coming of the Messiah the Son of David: "*Of the increase of whose government and peace there is no end*" (Isaiah 9: 7)

In the interval between the dissent in the time of Rehoboam, until the Assyrian captivity, the reign of Judah intermingled with the reign of Israel. The goal of this was to confirm that those who disregarded the worship of God or opposed it, and perverted to idol-worship, have reaped failure and collapse; On the contrary, the good kings among those of Judah have enjoyed success, conquest, and prosperity.

KING SOLOMON:

The first nine chapters of the book concern the person of king Solomon; and of them six chapters concern the building of the temple, considered as the most important of Solomon's achievements.

Many think of Solomon from the angle of his multiple marriages; which were not according to God's will, the fruition of this sin was the dissent of the kingdom in the days of his son Rehoboam. That, though, did not destroy the positive aspect and the holy zeal to build the temple and to care for the worship of God.

In the introduction of his poem about Solomon and the two harlots, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi proclaims the bitterness of his soul, for he spent a long time seeking nothing from God, he counted himself worthy of scourges, for he did not attempt to have the riches of the divine treasures by perpetual seeking; the way Solomon sought from God to grant him heavenly wisdom to care for the people of God. At the same time, he was confused: Should he keep seeking from God, who has already given him much, while did not thank Him enough; or should he cease seeking and keep silent; counting this as unbecoming reaction to God's gifts.

+ Behold, all generations draw their riches from Your huge wealth, and from the rich flow of the spring of Your treasure,.

I count myself as worthy of scourges on account of my shameful slothfulness to seek Your riches for such a long time.

Who sought from You, and did not get all his needs? And who called You, and You did not respond?

(St (Mar Jacob El-Serougi)

With all the blessings that Solomon got through the blessings of his righteous father David, We are committed to perceive the responsibility of everyone for his own faith and behavior on the great day of the Lord.

+ On this great day of the Lord, the wicked start to beg from the righteous, and say: 'Please supplicate and seek from God for our sake.

The Judge is awesome, and our deeds are horrible; Seek for our sake from God to have mercy upon us.

The righteous looks at his brother who is tormented for doing iniquity, and has fear to supplicate on his behalf.

The great Adam will not be able to benefit his firstfruit Cain in his suffering; nor intercede for him before the divine Judge.

The righteous Isaac will not answer for his greedy son Esau, nor defend his foolishness.

David, with all the beauty of his faith, will not be able to help his son Solomon, when he is tried because his idol-worship.

The soul that errs is the one to give an account before the divine Judge; There will be no chance for anyone to supplicate for someone else.

Why did not the wise virgins refrain to give oil from their vessels to the foolish ones?

They said: "*No, lest there should not be enough for us and you*". Everyone will be on his own before the throne.

Everyone's deeds will be portrayed on his face; and no one will be adorned by those of someone else;

(St (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

Man can perceive the goal of the two books of the chronicles by comparing between what came in the two books of the kings concerning Solomon, and what came concerning him in the second book of the chronicles. In the books of the kings the story of the two harlots occupies a prominent position, to show the wisdom of Solomon since his early youth at the beginning of his reign. Through the gift of wisdom granted to him from God, he was not preoccupied with their shameful behavior as harlots, but with saving the little infant from the hands of the one falsely claiming to be his mother, and to deliver him to his true and compassionate mother. In that he represented a man of wisdom, love, justice, and peace. In the book of the chronicles, on the other hand, it did not refer to this story, but concentrated upon the building of the temple, and organizing the worship therein; as for example: burning the sweet incense; enjoying the permanent showbread, the burnt offerings, the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the feasts; and caring for establishing the choirs of praise. He was the man of worship and exultation, as though in heaven itself.

THE KINGS AFTER THE DISSENT:

As there was no good king in the northern kingdom (Israel), the book did not concentrate on that kingdom, but on the kingdom of Judah, and on the seed of king David.

As there were good and prominent kings in the kingdom of Judah, who cared for the spiritual revival of the nation; there were, as well, wicked kings, who caused the kingdom to fall under the divine chastisement by the Assyrian captivity that lasted for seventy years.

THE FEATURES OF THE BOOK:

- 1- This book is considered as a natural extension of the first book of the chronicles; the two books were one book in the original Hebrew texts.

- 2- What come in this book is not considered a repetition of what came in the two books of the kings without a goal. For the book here is not, in truth, a historical parade of the kings since the death of David until the return from the Babylonian captivity; but, in essence, is a practical demonstration of the role of the true worship, and the care for the sanctity of the temple, since the time it was built, until its destruction by the hands of the Babylonians, and the fall of the people in captivity, because of their slothfulness in worship, not caring for the love of God, and not acquiring the edifying fear of God.

It is truly the book of the house of God, a call for the church as a holy congregation, and even a call for every believer to have his heart kindled with the worship, by the Spirit and the truth; for the kingdom of God to be built in the inner man, as a deposit of the higher Jerusalem.

- 3- The purpose of this book differ from that of the two books of the kings, which present a spiritual historical parade to reveal the exalted love of God for His people; which the people with all their categories, even the priests, paid back with a desire to be liberated from God, as though He intended to enslave them; And, at the same time, many of them had their happiness in the carnal pleasures, abominations, imitating the pagan nations. Hence the books of the kings care to show the shortcomings of even the good kings; and the horrible sins of the northern kingdom, Israel, that embraced ten tribes; in which there was not a single good king who cared to be attached to God.

- 4- The persistence of the kingdom of Israel to rebel, to oppose the divine truth, to mix between the worship of the true God and the pagan worship;

and to make alliance with the pagan nations against the kingdom of Judah, together with a hatred toward David's household; caused the kingdom to fall into the Assyrian captivity; the worst of its kind in history.

5- There were good kings in the kingdom of Judah; yet they had, as well, serious mistakes; and their children were in most cases wicked, did not walk upright in the sight of the Lord. And the kingdom of Judah, not benefiting from the lesson of the fall of the kingdom of Israel into the Assyrian captivity, fell into the same sins into which Israel did, and ended up to fall into the Babylonian captivity.

6 The second book of the king came to confirm the grace of God working even in the darkest of eras; on account of that there are always a holy remnant who faithfully seek the Holy One.

7- The second book of the chronicles start by the enthronement of king Solomon the sage, in which we notice the following:

- a- It so seem that the first, the main, and even the only preoccupation of the new king, was to build the house of the Lord.
- b- The book does not care to talk about the attempts of some to take the throne by force; on account of that it intends to show that the enthronement of king Solomon was a symbol of the coming of the King of peace, the incarnate Word of God, to set His kingdom in the hearts of the believers.
- c- It shows the person of Solomon as though a priest king; although he was not of a Levite descent; yet he was a symbol of the Lord Christ, the King of kings, and the heavenly High Priest, at the same time.

8- It shows the connection between the royal throne and the temple; that none of them would prosper without the other. Here we see how the high priest, with courage and a spirit of godliness, cared to deliver the throne to Joash, a descendant of David, and was his counselor. And, on the contrary, when king Uzziah attempted to force himself upon the task of priesthood, through his authority as king, he was instantly afflicted with leprosy (Chapter 26)

9- Unfortunately, there were very wicked kings among the descendants of David, like Ahaz the son of Jotham, and the grandson of Uzziah, who cut the articles of the house of God to pieces, closed the gates of the house of the Lord before the people, and built for himself altars in every corner of the cities of Judah. Carrying bitter animosity against God and His worship, he was the cause of the destruction of the kingdom of Judah in the days of his grandchildren.

10- Despite all the evil done by the wicked Ahaz, the grace of God dwelt upon his son Hezekiah, who did what is right in the sight of God, according to what his father David did. Always ready to act, the grace of God

worked in some, whose fathers were wicked; as for example:

It worked in Jotham who feared the Lord; although he was the son of Uzziah who attempted to force himself upon the task of priesthood.

It worked in Hezekiah, the good king, who came after the wicked kings Manasseh and Amon.

11- God kept on sending prophets to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, even during the most evil moments; He even sent great prophets of authority to confront wicked kings.

12- In His love for mankind, God searches for a holy man in the entire earth, to make him a blessing for others; *“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him”* (2 Chronicles 16 9).

In every generation we hear of a remnant that may seem unknown to men, but known to God, and the object of His pleasure.

THE DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK:

The first section: The reign of Solomon (Chapters 1 to 9)

- i. The beginning of Solomon’s reign
1
- ii. The building of the temple
2 - 7
- iii. The glories of the era of Solomon
8 - 9

The second section: The kings after Solomon (Chapter 10 to 36):

- 1- Dissent in the days of Rehoboam
10 - 12
- 2- Spiritual revival in the days of Abijah
13
- 3- Revival and happiness in the days of Asa
14 - 16
- 4- Godliness and prosperity in the days of Jehoshaphat
17 - 20
- 5- A set back in the days of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah
21 - 22
- 6- Uneasiness in the days of Joash and Amaziah
23 - 25

- 7- Prosperity in the days of Uzziah
26
 - 8- The era of Jotham
17
 - 9- Defilement in the days of Ahaz
28
 - 10- Glory in the days of Hezekiah
29 - 32
 - 11- Evil in the days of Manasseh and Amon
33
 - 12- Reform in the days of Josiah
34 - 35
 - 13-Perdition and destruction in the days of the sons of
Josiah 36
-

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES

GRANT ME TO BUILD YOUR HOLY HOUSE

- + My God, You have chosen Solomon the son of David to sit on the throne;
You granted him to build a holy house for Yourself;
You satisfied his heart with Yourself, to seek nothing more for himself;
While a young man, he sought wisdom to be able to shepherd Your
people;
You granted him more than what he asked, and beyond what he sought;
He acquired the attachment to You, O Source of satiety;
By You, he became rich, glorified, and filled with peace.

- + You granted me the spirit of adoption to Your heavenly Father;
By You, O King of kings, I would become a son and a king;
I shall desire nothing for myself, except to liken You, O Lover of mankind;
I shall love every one, even those who oppress me;
By You, I shall enjoy the heavenly wisdom, to seek the salvation of all
mankind;
I desire that all would become a holy temple for You;
Where the sound of praise from the heart is heard;
Where the sweet fragrance of incense would come forth from everyone.
And where burnt offerings of love are unceasingly offered.

- + Our souls grieve for what happened after the death of Solomon;
To see the dissent of the kingdom because of the violence and
foolishness of Rehoboam;
The ten tribes gathered together against You;
They set calves and goats to worship;
They rejected to be attached to You after three years of idol-worship;
They went astray from You, O Sun of righteousness;
They loved the darkness more than the divine Light.

- + By Your love, You turned evil to good;
You separated the goats (the ten tribes) from the sheep;
You kept the kingdom of Judah, to keep the lamp of David's household
lighted;
You are the Controller of history; O the whole Goodness;
You work along the generations for the salvation of mankind.

- + Amid the pitch darkness, Your grace did not forsake humanity;
Among the ten tribes, there were those who returned to You;
Who forsook their tribes, and attached themselves to Jerusalem and
Judah;

- Who walked by the spirit, and not by the body lusts;
And among the two tribes, there was a remnant holy to You.
- + The devil used all his energies to quench the lighted lamp;
He did not cease his attempts to draw the kings of Judah to evil;
But Your promise remained true;
And in the darkest situation, there was found a child of the royal seed
(Joash).
- + In our amazement before the works of Your love; What could we say?!
You chastised Your people by the Babylonian captivity;
The seventy years of captivity passed very heavily;
That many assumed that it is impossible to fulfill Your promises;
Is it possible to return from captivity after such a long time?
Is it possible again for a son of David to sit on the throne?
Is it possible to rebuild the temple of Solomon that was utterly destroyed?
Is it possible for Jerusalem to be the holy city of God again?
- + Being God of the impossible, the people returned by a decree from the
Persian king;
The temple was rebuilt, Jerusalem was re-set, and the worship was
resumed;
All that was nothing but a symbol of You, O Son of David;
You liberated us from the bondage of the devil;
You set both the Jews and the Gentiles together, a holy church for
Yourself
You granted us to set Your kingdom in our hearts.
You gave us a royal authority, to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children
of God;
Now, Grant me not to cease praying and working;
Until I see Your holy house set in every heart;

Glory be to You, O Savior of the world.



THE FIRST SECTION

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON

(Chapters 1 to 9)

The book cares to talk about the reign of Solomon, known for wisdom and peace; to become a symbol of the era of the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, who presents Himself to us to acquire Him in our life, being “the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1: 24), and ‘The God of peace” (1 Corinthians 14: 33).

The book did not refer to the faults of Solomon; to present him a symbol of the heavenly kingdom of Christ, set by the Holy Spirit of God in the depths of our hearts; to hear the divine voice, say: “*The kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17: 21).

The reign of Solomon and the righteousness of the Lord Christ:

The book disregarded the verdict on Adonijah, who opposed his father David (1 Kings 1); Shimei the son of Gera who reviled and scoffed him (1 Kings 2: 8); and Joab known for arrogance and rebellion. According to a request from his father David, Solomon issued a verdict of death upon the three of them.(1 Kings 1: 1-2). But it cared to mention the story of the two harlots, each of whom attempted to refer the living infant to herself, and the dead infant to the other (1 Kings 3: 16-28). But Solomon with wisdom revealed the truth. He did not base his verdict on their evil as being harlots, and their drunkenness that one of them did not feel that she lied over her own infant and killed him; and that the other did not feel that her living baby was stolen from her bosom and replaced by the dead one; but the book showed how the king by his wisdom revealed the truth, and exposed the lie, and the deception.

About Solomon it was written: *“The Lord his God was with him and exalted him exceedingly”* (2 Chronicles 1; 2). In this he was a symbol of the Lord Christ, who said on behalf of all humanity that got the royal life back in Him: *“Ask of me and I will give you, the nations for Your inheritance; and the ends of the earth for Your possession”* (Psalm 2: 8)



CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING OF SOLOMON’S REIGN

The book start by talking about Solomon’s visit to the tabernacle of meeting in the town of Gibeon. (The ark of the covenant was in Jerusalem).

Once David took over Jerusalem, he put in his heart to bring the ark of the covenant forth to Jerusalem, being the capital of his kingdom. That task carried a symbol of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus in our life., His dwelling in our hearts, and our submission to Him by love. In the second chapter we see how David's plan was realized; the task of building the temple of the Lord started by Solomon, being a symbol of the Lord Christ the King of peace; Who set us as His temple by His Holy Spirit.

1- The Lord exalts Solomon	1
2- The tabernacle of meeting comes first	2 - 4
3- The altar and the sacrifices	5 - 6
4- God Appears to Solomon	7 - 9
5- Solomon seeks from God wisdom and knowledge	10
6- God gives more than what we seek	11 - 12.
7- Solomon and his chariots and horsemen	13 – 17

1- THE LORD EXALTS SOLOMON:

“Now Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him, and exalted him exceedingly” (1)

In the last chapter of the first book of the chronicles, it was said: *“The Lord God exalted Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed on him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel” (1 Chronicles 29: 25).*;

The Lord says: *“Those who honor Me I will honor” (1 Samuel 2: 30)*. Solomon honored the Lord; He gave priority to the Lord. Before sitting on the throne, to practice any royal work concerning the nation, he gathered together all the leaderships and the people, and set forth to the high place that was at Gibeon, to

offer a sacrifice to the Lord in the tabernacle of God, that was made by the prophet Moses in the wilderness 93).

He received a throne disputed by his own brothers; but the Lord strengthened him and exalted him, for He was with him.

In this book, Solomon is shown with riches, greatness, authority, and glory, since his enthronement; yet without showing his increase in this concern, the way it is shown in the book of the kings; on account of that the present book presents Solomon to us as a symbol of the Lord Christ who came down to carry humanity up to His heavens, and to grant them fellowship in His glories. If the Lord Christ, in His humility became poor, it was to make us rich by His poverty. His glories, not being outside Him; for He is the source of the riches, the righteousness, the holiness, and the glory; He intends to grant us Himself, to see all satiety in Him.

+ No one is good except God, who alone brings forth happiness to man, gives him security, and peace of mind.

(St. Basil the Great)

+ Dedicating ourselves to God, we honor ourselves. He who opens his eyes to see the sun, will receive gladness in him ... Those who honor God do that for the sake of their salvation, and for their great benefit. How? For whoever practices virtue glorifies God; "*Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's* ((1 Corinthians 6: 20).

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING COMES FIRST:

“And Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the captains of thousands, and of hundreds, to the judges , and to every leader in all Israel, the heads of the fathers’ houses” (2)

The leadership who were around Solomon, being obviously worship-lovers; partook of Solomon’s love for the collective life of worship.

“Then Solomon and all the congregation with him went to the high place that was at Gibeon, for the tabernacle of meeting with God was there, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness” (3)

Gibeon has been once the greatest sanctuary in Israel; then eventually became just a stop on the way to Jerusalem. No shortcomings were mentioned of Gibeon , as a center of worship (1 Kings 1: 3-4); where the tabernacle of meeting has been; and the bronze altar, that Bezaleel the son of Uri the son of Hur, had made, and put before the tabernacle of the Lord (1: 3-5).

All Israel gathered together around king Solomon. Here he describe his journey, together with Israel to Gibeon in some details not mentioned in the book of the kings 93-6), to show that what Solomon did came as an extension of what the prophet Moses has done in the old. For the king’ s intent was to confirm his sanctification and appreciation of the tabernacle of meeting made 300 years before by the prophet Moses; and of the bronze altar made by Bezaleel (Exodus 31: 38). Namely building the temple of Solomon does not imply an end of the worship inherited by Israel; but an extension of it, bearing the same thought.

Solomon started his reign by a popular visit to the tabernacle of meeting and the altar of God. It was a good start of his work; for all Israel felt the need for the

presence of God among them; that they were in the presence of the Lord; and that the Lord is accompanying them in their whole life journey.

“But David had brought up the ark of God from Kirjat Jearim to the place David had prepared for it, for he has pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem” (4)

3- THE ALTAR AND THE SACRIFICES:

“Now the bronze altar that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the Lord; Solomon and the congregation sought Him there” (5)

The secret of the power of the tabernacle was the altar that refers to the cross and the sacrifice of the Lord Christ for the salvation of the world. Through the cross, we bear the righteousness of the Crucified, to come to be righteous in the sight of God; by which we may sing, saying: *“the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open on their prayers but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil”* (1 Peter 3: 12)

The leaders and the people went together with king Solomon to Gibeon where the tabernacle of meeting and the altar of God were; which refer to our accompanying the crucified Lord Christ, the King of Peace, to enjoy the heavenly dwelling place; and to experience the cross, the *“power of God to salvation”* (Romans 1: 16)

“And Solomon went up there to the bronze altar before the Lord, which was at the tabernacle of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it” (6)

Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on the altar (6); and probably more than that of peace offerings, as a sign of gladness and joy before the Lord.

In the beginning of his talk about Solomon, the author of the book intentionally mentioned that he offered a thousand burnt offerings on the bronze altar. And that when God appeared to Solomon, He said to him: "*I have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice*" (7: 12). If the figure 1000 in the Holy Book often refers to heaven and the heavenlies; the goal of this book that concentrates on the temple and worship is to proclaim the opening of the gates of heaven before the Jews as well as before the gentiles, so that the church of the new covenant embracing all, would offer the complete burnt offering; namely the perfect love for God; the way Abraham offered his beloved son a burnt offering, acceptable as the sweet fragrance of pleasure before God.

According to some scholars, the book of the chronicles does not refer to the sin offering, nor to the trespass offering; so that the altar would seem as though dedicated to the burnt offerings and the peace offerings. Building the house of the Lord is a call to all mankind to exalt and partake of the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise of the heavenlies, as an expression of love and a response to the exalted love of God toward His rational creation.

Exultant in the spirit on his way to martyrdom, St. Agnatus expressed his view of the church as the given body of Christ; as Christ offers the Eucharist, His body and blood, given to make the church live enjoying together with her crucified Groom with the spirit of giving. That was what motivated him to identify the church as 'the place of the sacrifice' (Thysiasterion) in more than one place.

+ Being a priest for my Lord Jesus Christ, I offer the sacrifice to Him on a daily basis; and desire to offer my life a sacrifice; the way He offered His life a sacrifice in love for my sake.

(Agnatius bishop of Antioch)

4- GOD APPEARS TO SOLOMON:

“On that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, ‘Ask! What shall I give you?’” (7)

As Solomon cared to talk to the leaders with the spirit of love, and set forth with them to the tabernacle of meeting, where he offered a thousand burnt offerings on the altar, God appeared to him to ask him what he needs.

The two prophets Nathan and Gad were counselors of David the prophet and king; But it so seems that, because there were no prophets in the days of Solomon; God Himself appeared to him, and talked to him. That does not imply that Solomon was better than his father to whom God spoke through His prophets; For God works in different ways according to the circumstances. He even spoke directly to some of the men of the Gentiles as Abimelech (Genesis 20); the Egyptian servants of Pharaoh (Genesis 4), and to Pharaoh himself (Genesis 41).

The word “ask” and its derivatives came here eight times in God’s talk to Solomon, as man’s request, particularly from God, reveals to a great extent what lie in his heart. If Solomon has been a warrior, he would have asked for conquest on his enemies; but, seeing himself a young king, a successor of such a great king like David, he is in need of wisdom to judge the people of God; That was therefore what he asked God to give him – wisdom.

According to Josephus the Jewish Historian, When God appeared to Solomon, the later jumped out of his bed.

God never cease to ask us: *“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full”* (John 16: 24).

- + What you may ask would be counted as nothing compared to what I intend to give you. For what would you ask in My name? ... To make the demons submit to you? ... Do not rejoice in this for it is nothing; for if it was, He would have told His disciples to rejoice. Do not ask for temporal things, for *“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again”* (John 4: 13)... Ask for what will give you satiety; ... Talk in the language of Philip: *“Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient to us”* (John 14: 8); to which the Lord responded, saying to him: *“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father”* (John 14: 9 – Volgata)

Offer thanksgiving to Christ who became weak for your sake, for you are weak; Let your requests befitting of the Godhead of Christ, to be satisfied.

- + Saying *“All you have asked”*; should not be understood as ‘any thing’, but it should, in truth, refer to the blessed life. What follows: *“Until now you have asked nothing in My name”* (John 16: 24), could be understood in two ways: Either you have not asked in My name; as you still do not know My name as you should; or you asked nothing, compared to what you should ask; namely what you ask is counted as nothing.

(St. Augustine)

“And Solomon said to God, ‘You have shown great mercy to David my father, and have made me king in his place’ (8)

A recognition of God's favor with thanksgiving: *"You have made me king in his place"* You let me take the lace of such a good, great, and godly man; he who has consummated his mission with the spirit of faithfulness; as though he says together with Elisha to his spiritual father Elijah: *"Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me"* (2 kings 1: 9) I wish we bear the same spirit; and feel that what our fathers got of divine blessings, is a deposit for us, which is befitting of us to use.

His father David has got mercy from God. Although he sinned, yet, by repentance, he enjoyed the mercies of God.

- + *"No one is pure of defilement even if he is one day old on earth"* . David moans, saying: *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me"* (Psalm 51: 5); And the apostle also proclaims: *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood through faith"* (Romans 3: 23-25). Hence the forgiveness of sin is given to those who believe in God; as the Lord Himself says: *"For this is My blood for the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26: 28).

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Despite the fact that God's servants and friends avoid the sins that are for death, and practice many good works, yet we do not expect them to be altogether without little sins; for God does not lie when he says: *"Not even a little infant of one day on earth is without sin"*.() And the blessed John the Evangelist, who was no doubt not less worthy than the righteous 'Job', proclaims: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and*

the truth is not in us" (1 John 1: 8); And it is written: "*A righteous man may fall seven times, and rise again*" (Proverbs 24: 16).

(Father Caesarius bishop of Arle)

- + I quoted the verse saying, "No one is without sin even if he is only one day old on earth"; and added to it: "*death reigned even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam*" (Romans 5: 14); a view proclaimed by the Holy Book in a very clear way by confirming that the little children of Nineveh were justly committed to fast together with the grown up people, who fasted for their serious sins.
- + If the stars themselves are not pure in the sight of God, how much more are the corrupted men who submitted to the sin of disobedience of Adam?

(St. Augustine)

"Now, O Lord God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me a king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude" (9)

"Let Your promise to David my father be established". The best thing to seek from God is to fulfill in us His divine promises to our fathers, to us, and to all men; "*Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope*" (Psalm 119: 49).

4- SOLOMON SEEKS FROM GOD WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE:

“Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before the people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?” (10)

Here, it was not mentioned that Solomon was a little child, who does not know how to go out or to come in (1 Kings 3: 7); for he is a symbol of the Lord Christ the Wisdom of God; but it was said that he was in need of wisdom to go out and to come in before the people and to judge them.

As a true son of his father David, Solomon chose the spiritual and not the temporal blessings; knowing that those gifts bring pleasure to God, who He is the One to give them (Proverb 2: 6).

“For who can judge this great people of Yours” (10). A beautiful feeling of the heavy weight and seriousness of the responsibility; together with a trust and confidence in God’s possibilities, and in His gifts to us. Solomon did not seek wisdom to boast it, but to serve the people of his Lord with the spirit of godliness, and to judge them with the spirit of justice.

According to St. John Chrysostom, {seeking what he should, notice how he quickly got two things that should always be in our prayers: To seek with zeal, and to seek what he should seek

+ David peacefully has fallen asleep; and was replaced by the young man Solomon on the throne; to whom God said: [Keep my commandments the way your father David did; Rise up and reign over his kingdom. I shall be with you; I shall exalt your name in the whole world, if you are with me, keeping my commandments, and doing my will].

.
Then the virgin young man got down on his knees to pray before God, a pure prayer, full of beautiful words of love, heard by God in His exalted

position; saying: [O God of my father David, receive my prayers, and do not go away from me, for it is You who has chosen me a king..

Grant me a heart full of the secrets of hidden things, to judge Your people with faithfulness and righteousness (1 Kings 3: 8)

I am a little boy; Be for me a Leader and a Mentor, wiser than any scribe; Guide David's son, instruct him, and give him wisdom.

I do not seek riches, but to give me understanding to discern between good and evil (1 Kings 3: 9-11).

I do not, and will never seek the life of my enemies, but I only seek a heart full of the secrets of faith (1 Kings 3: 11).

6- GOD GIVES MORE THAN WHAT WE SEEK:

“And God said to Solomon, ‘Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life – but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king ...’”(11)

How did he get such a great inspiration?... If we go back to 1 Chronicles 22: 11-12, we would hear the voice of the prophet David say to his son: *“Now my son, may the Lord be with you, and may you prosper and build the house of the Lord Your God, as He has said to you. Only may the Lord give you wisdom and understanding, and give you charge concerning Israel, that you may keep the law of the Lord your God”*. Having listened to the voice of his father, when God asked him: *“What shall I give you?”*, Solomon instantly answered: (I want to have wisdom and understanding)” (11).

“Wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings had who have been before you, nor shall any after

you have the like” (12)

Although Solomon did not seek riches, wealth, or honor, God gave them to him. Whoever despises the things of this world, God will give him with abundance. The Lord Christ says: “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6: 33)

Because he asked for himself the wisdom and discernment; namely he sought the practical wisdom by which he could practice the life befitting of the believer, God granted him both the mental and the practical wisdom; that there was no one like Solomon, until the coming of the Lord Christ, who is greater than Solomon (Matthew 21: 42; Luke 11: 31). We are promised by Jesus the Lord of glory, that if we seek the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, He will grant us the other things; for they will not possess us, nor preoccupy us from the One who granted them, or corrupt our hearts (Matthew 6: 33); Together with the heavenly grace, He will grant us our temporal needs; as all the earthly goods will be for our benefit. Whereas without the grace, these goods will enslave our souls.

+ God then talked to Solomon and said to him: I have chosen you, and will never forsake you.

And because your mouth sought a just judgment (1 Kings 3: 13), and because you hated the riches and the vain glory;

I shall grant you wealth, glory, and greatness; and your reputation will spread all over the world among the kings and peoples of the earth; They will all be in awe before you (1 Kings 3: 3); and they will come from everywhere to see how great is your wisdom.

8- SOLOMON, HIS CHARIOTS, AND HIS HORSEMEN:

“So Solomon came to Jerusalem from the high place that was at Gibeon, from before the tabernacle of meeting, and reigned over Israel” (13)

“And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen, he had one thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem” (14)

Kings of Israel were forbidden to “*multiply horses for themselves*” (Deuteronomy 17: 16), so as not to be like the pagan kings who assume that their greatness is in the outer appearances. Yet Solomon forced himself into a forbidden area; when his own father David never rode a chariot, nor a horse; he rode nothing higher than a mule.

“Also the king made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland” (15)

The book confirms that God fulfilled what He promised Solomon, Beside wisdom, He granted him wealth and glory. Solomon made gold and silver like stones, and cedar wood like the Sycamore, the abundance of which makes them cheaper and of less value; Whereas the abundance of grace, will increase their value.

“And Solomon had horses imported from Egypt and Keveh; the king’s merchants brought them in Keveh at the current price” (16)

See the commentary on 1 Kings 10: 28)

“*Keveh*”, according to some means textile or linen threads, with which Egypt was famous.

“They also acquired and imported from Egypt a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty; thus, through their agents, they exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria”
(17)

Initiating commercial relationships with Egypt, Solomon imported horses and linen, which he processed and exported to Syria with great profit (1 Kings 10: 28-29). He probably learned this from his mother, who, like virtuous women, *“Makes linen garments, and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants (of Canaan) (Proverbs 31: 24).*

Now, everything was well established , and the circumstances were ready to start building the temple.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 CHRONICLES 1

IN YOUR COMPANY, O LORD, I SHALL TAKE THE ROYAL PATH

- + Being with Solomon, O Lord, he took the royal path
He was greatly strengthened and learned, for he attached himself to You;
By a divine wisdom, he did not work on his own;
But cooperated with all the leaderships;
Not to boast his abilities, knowledge, and wisdom
But to set forth together with them to the tabernacle of meeting;
And under Your tabernacle, He enjoyed the divine presence.

- + Strengthen me, O my God, to take the royal path;
To work by You, and with Your grace

To work together with my brethren, and not to isolate myself from them;
To encounter You In the midst of my brethren, O Lover of mankind.

+ I wish You are transfigured before me, as You appeared to Solomon;
To hear Your divine voice, and acquire You;
To enjoy the divine wisdom, in and by You;
You are the secret of my riches, satiety, and joy;
You are the secret of my prosperity and happiness;
I hold fast to Your divine promises, the way my fathers did.

+ I will take the royal path; and will not divert to the right or to the left;
I shall never feel need;
To me, the gold and silver of the world will be like stones;
And the chariots of the world, and all its possessions, as nothing.

+ Lifting my heart up to Your heavens;
And setting my soul forth as though on heavenly chariots;
I shall find rest in You, and abide forever;
All the currents of this world will not terrify me;
And the temptations of life will not destroy me;
I shall spend my whole life, an exultant journey in Your company
My soul will find peace; and the doors of my heart, mind, and emotions,
will open up for You;
By Your cross, You opened the gates of paradise before me;
And by Your grace You open the doors of my inner man;
Enter into my depths, O King of kings;
And set Your kingdom in me.

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CHAPTER 2

THE PREPARATIONS FOR BUILDING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

This chapter reveals the goal of talking about the person of king Solomon; as the book disregarded the political aspect in Solomon's life, as it did in his father David's life; and concentrated on their role in the life of worship, and the relationship of the people with God.

Solomon was characterized by a wide mind, an ability to judge with wisdom and discipline, together with a grace from God to have the cooperation of the leaderships and the whole people (1: 2). He entered, as well, into commercial relationships with Egypt, the Hittites, and the Aramites (16, 17). Now we see him issue an order to start building the house of the Lord, and prepare for that task inside and outside, with a spirit of humility, and the living testimony to God, for whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain (6)

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1- The interior preparation for the building | 1 - 2 |
| 2- Solomon seeks a skillful man from the king of Tyre | 3 - 7. |
| 3- Solomon seeks the best kinds of wood | 8 - 9 |
| 4- Solomon gives a pledge to sustain the workers | 10 |
| 5- A Message from the king of Tyre to Solomon | 11 -
16 |
| 6- The aliens who were dwelling in the land of Israel partake of the work | 17 – 18 |

1- THE INSIDE PREPARATION FOR THE BUILDING:

Here, Solomon provides us with a program of work, whether spiritual or temporal; which is to start by the inside before worrying about the needs from the outside.

“Then Solomon determined to build a temple for the name of the Lord, and a royal house for himself” (1)

Solomon issued an order to build a house for the name of the Lord, and to build a royal house for himself. Here we notice that, while giving priority to the house of the Lord, at the same time, he did not disregard the needs of the State, namely to build a palace for running the affairs of the State. The spiritual work does not imply slothfulness, negligence, or disregard of the temporal commitments and responsibilities. He did not seek a house for his own comfort, nor to display his greatness, but sought one for his kingdom, namely for the services of the State, to receive his subjects; and to represent an honor before the other States. The first house is therefore for the glory of God, and the second one for the public interest. He did not seek what is for himself, but rather what is for the Lord and his brethren. As it was to be for administrative use, and as a dwelling place for himself; It needed therefore; a high level of planning, which together with the building took thirteen years to accomplish.(2 Kings 7: 1-12).

Solomon inherited from his father David his heart desire, and realized what he, for so long dreamt; he who used to sing,: *“One thing I have desired from the Lord, that will I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple”* (Psalm 27: 4); And, *“Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty God of Jacob”* (Psalm 132: 3-5)

In the wilderness, the people used to bring offerings and sacrifices to the movable tabernacle; but now, being established in the promised land, and David made huge efforts to widen the kingdom, it was high time to build a house for the Lord, particularly that David had prepared an abundance of building materials and plans, and prepared the leaders and the people for this task.

“Solomon selected seventy thousand men to bear burdens, eighty thousand to quarry stone in the mountains, and three thousand six hundred to oversee them” (2)

According to some, the personality of Solomon is different from that of his father David: ... between David, the simple shepherd, who loved the people of God, and served them with his whole heart, And Solomon, famed for his wisdom given to Him by God, to set establishments, the temple of God in particular;....

Between David, the warrior who was preoccupied with battles since his youth to the account of the people of God, trusting in God the Grantor of conquest; and Solomon the man of politics, who attempted to make good relationships with the surrounding nations, to have their support in the fulfillment of his projects; ...

Between David the ideal leader, who did what is right in the sight of God, to be counted as the measure by which every king of Judah was evaluated; and Solomon, ideal in his wisdom; whose was credited for building the temple (John 10: 23; Acts 3: 11; 5: 12); which the Jews desire to rebuild up to this very day.

According to some, Solomon assumed that he has exalted his people, having brought them forth into the realm of the nations, and entered into commercial treaties that brought prosperity and glory to his people in his days.; but the price was too high, too heavy, and too bitter, after his death, and up to several generations ahead, for his policy has actually caused a spiritual decline for his people.

2- SOLOMON SEEKS A SKILLFUL MAN FROM THE KING OF TYRE:

“Then Solomon sent to Hiram king of Tyre, saying: ‘As you have dealt with David my father, and sent him cedars to build himself a house to dwell in, so deal with me” (3)

After numbering the working men in his State, Solomon resorted to the king of Tyre in a spiritual, meek, and wise way. ... Solomon probably wrote to thank Hiram for congratulating him on his enthronement; and at the same time to seek his help in building a house for the name of the Lord. Here we notice

a- He starts his message by revealing the good relationships that were between Hiram king of Tyre and David his father, an old, true and genuine relationship (3). Then Solomon talked to Hiram concerning the building of a

house for the Lord, and the covenant with God (2 Samuel 7). Solomon sought from the king of Tyre a sign of replenishing that true and amiable relationship.

b- He was not going to erect a memorial for his father David; but to build a temple for God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot not contain. Solomon was preoccupied, not with his temporal glory, nor that of his father, but the glory of the living God.

c- In an obvious way, Solomon reveals his goal of building a house for the Lord his God; namely in order for the people with their priests, to practice the following:

* To glorify Him (4); Namely to testify to Him that He is Holy; to imitate the Seraphim, who sing to Him “Holy” three times (Isaiah 6: 3); and to repeat it without ceasing.

* To burn before Him sweet incense (4); to imitate the living creatures, and the heavenly priests who stand before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints

(Revelation 5: 8)

* To offer the perpetual showbread (4)

* To offer morning and evening burnt offerings (4)

* To practice weekly celebrations (the Sabbaths), monthly celebrations (the new moons), annual celebrations (the set feasts of the Lord our God). Beside the Jubilee, etc. (4)

In his friendship with the king of Tyre, Solomon does not flatter him but testifies to God, saying: “*for our God is greater than all gods ... the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (5-6)*; for fear that Hiram would assume

that the God of Israel is like his own pagan gods, whom they contain in their temples.

d- Together with cherishing God with humility, he wrote without reservation: “*Who am I then that I should build him a temple, except to burn sacrifice before him?*”

(6). Together with his desire to build Him a great house,

there is, however, no comparison between the greatness of the house, and the greatness of the Lord Himself. He intended to confirm to the king of Tyre that God is not like the gods of the Gentiles, dwells in a man-

made house (Acts 17: 24); but he builds a house for Him, so that the priests and the worshippers would find a place to express their love for God, and their desire to worship Him.

e- Solomon asks Hiram to send him a man of understanding and experience.

Although Solomon has skillful men in Jerusalem and Judah whom his father David assigned (1 Chronicles 22: 150; yet he is in need of a leader to

lead those men in that huge task..

The king of Tyre represented the Gentiles, whom the children of Israel failed to drive out or to send away from the promised land; But he also represented the little remnant that could receive faith in the living God; and were

hence acceptable as partners in that great work – the building of the house of the Lord.

Solomon's message to Hiram the king of Tyre reveals the following scriptural view of the temple or the house of the Lord:

:

a- The book, and in particular that message reveal that the main work of Solomon was to build the house of the Lord, and to organize the worship therein; and to engage the whole nation in an encounter with God through

worship. It so seem that Solomon with all his wisdom and activities, were only preoccupied with nothing else but building the temple.

b- A confirmation that, although God is not limited by one place, yet He proclaims His presence for the sake of His people, to make them enjoy His encounter, and to express the mutual love between Him and humanity, particularly with His own people.

c- Solomon's care for the contribution of Hiram and his men in building the temple, prepares the way to reveal the call of the Gentiles to the gospel of Christ; something that God has long prepared the Jews to accept, all along their history, through their prophets.

There was the righteous 'Job', who, though he was not a descendant of Abraham; yet in his name, a whole book in the Holy Book was dedicated; and about whom it was said: "*This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and chunned evil*" (Job 1: 1).

And the divine promise came to Abraham himself, saying "*As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of **many nations***" (Genesis 17: 4).

And the Lord says: "*These I will bring to My holy mountain, and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer **for***

all nations” (Isaiah 56: 7)

- + “*No prophet is accepted in his own town*” (Luke 4: 24). If Anathoth, the home town of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 11: 21), did not receive him well; and it was the same with Isaiah and the other prophets, who were rejected by their co-patriots; namely by the circumcised;...As for us, who do not belong to the covenant, but are foreigners to it, we received Moses and the prophets who proclaimed Christ, we received them with our whole hearts more than the Jews who rejected Christ, and did not testify to Him.
...

“Behold, I am building a temple for the name of the Lord my God, to dedicate it to Him, to burn before him sweet incense, for the continual showbread, for the burnt offerings

morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, on the new moons, and on the set feasts of the Lord our God. This is an ordinance forever to Israel” (4)

In his message to the king of Tyre, Solomon explained the significance of building the temple in a different way than what came in the book of the king; and drew his attention to the following concepts:

- 1- In His house, the Lord **dwells among His people** (3); namely it represents the divine presence.
- 2- It is the **personal** house of God with every believer: “***For the name of the Lord my God***” (4)
- 3- A sanctuary in which the sweet fragrance of incense is burned. Saying: “***To dedicate it to Him***” (4), he calls us to liken the Seraphim seen by the prophet Isaiah, who says: “*I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and*

exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were Seraphs, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory' (Isaiah 6: 1-3). St. Cyril the Great has a magnificent commentary on this text that concerns our commitment to the holy life and the holy worship, befitting to present to the Holy God.

+ “*They fly*” as they have no bodies to weigh them down; their minds are always high up toward God; their dominion is high up; they do not meditate in lowly things like we do, but keep their minds in the unutterable exalted things.

Their mouths “*offer praise, honor, and thanksgiving*”, which they proclaim in turn without getting bored; for everything up there is practiced in an elaborate order.

They utter the word “*Holy*” three times, and ends the song of thanksgiving by saying; “*The Lord of hosts*”; referring to the Holy Trinity as one divine nature.

In our confession we say that the Father is there, so is the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Nothing in their nature discerns between them, but they are one godhead, perceived in three Persons. This is confirmed in what

the holy Seraphim proclaims that “*the whole earth is full of His glory*”; by which they told us ahead of the future secret of the incarnation of Christ.

Before the Word becomes a body, the avenging Satan, the dragon, the apostate, had the dominion over the whole earth under heaven;

and the creation was worshipped instead of the Creator. But when the Word took a body, the whole earth became full of His glory; every knee bowed before him; and, according to the Holy Book, every tribe and tongue confessed Him and ministered to Him.

The blessed David presented this cry-out by the Spirit, saying: “*All nations whom You have made shall come and worship You, O Lord*” (Psalm 86:9 ;Philippi 2: 10-11).

(St. Cyril the Great)

- 4- **The house of the heavenly banquet**, for the perpetual showbread.
- 5- **The house of the perfect love**: where the believer presents his life a perfect burnt offering day and night. Here, Solomon referred to the burnt offerings, and not to the sin offering, nor to the trespass offering[as the book, here, does not talk about the sins and forgiveness, but takes us forth as though to heaven itself, where the perpetual praise is, and the perfect burnt offerings of love is made.
- 6- **The continual house of joy**: for the celebration of the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the set feasts of the Lord our God (4). By the set feasts of the Lord, he means the great annual feasts; namely, the Passover, the Pentecost; and the feast of the tabernacles (Leviticus 23: 4-44; Deuteronomy 16 1-17).

“And the temple which I build will be great, for our God is greater than all gods” (5)

“But who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. Who am I then, that I should build Him a temple, except to burn sacrifice before Him” (6)

The Old Testament often spoke of the heaven of heavens (Deuteronomy 10: 14; 1 Kings 8: 27; 2 Chronicles 6: 18; Nehemiah 9: 6; Psalm 68: 33; Psalm 148: 4).

The apostle Paul says that he was *“caught up to the third heaven”* (2 Corinthians 12: 2)

And in the ‘Targum’ it came: As the lower, middle, and the higher heavens, could not contain Him, who supports all things by His arm, and by His authority; the heaven is the throne of His glory, and the earth is His footstool; the depth and the whole world is supported by the spirit of His word; *“Who am I then, that I should build Him a temple?”* (6)

The Jews used to believe that there are seven heavens; and in the Old Testament, *“a heaven of heavens”* was mentioned; which most probably refers to the *“third heaven”*, where there is the divine throne, and the dwelling place of the saints with the heavenlies in the eternal life. And according to some, like ‘Ambroseaster’, [Paul the apostle was caught up twice: once to the third heaven, and another to the paradise, where the right hand robber was taken when he was crucified together with the Lord Christ].

“Therefore send me at once a man skillful to work in gold and silver, in bronze and iron, in purple, in crimson, and blue, who has skill to engrave with the skillful men who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom David my father provided” (7)

The excavations confirmed that the Israelites were not experts in arts

If God has chosen the children of Israel in the old as His own people, it was to prepare the way for the Savior of the world to come from the tribe of Judah, to

open up the gates of heaven before all nations and peoples. *“Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you; Your gates will always stand open; they will never be shut, day or night, so that men will bring you the wealth of the nations – their kings led in triumphal procession”* (Isaiah 6: 10, 11). And in Zechariah it came: *“Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the Lord; and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you”* (Zechariah 6: 15).

Solomon opens the gates of heaven before the peoples and the nations; for the house he builds is for God, whom the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain. ... Will it be confined to one people? ...It is the house of the Creator of heaven and earth, who will be content with the gathering together of all peoples together with Him, and with His ministers, the heavenly hosts.

3- SOLOMON SEEKS THE BEST KINDS OF WOOD:

“Also send me cedar and cypress and algum logs from Lebanon, for I know that your servants have skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and indeed my servants will be with your servants” (8)

“To prepare timber for me in abundance, for the temple which I am about to build shall be great and wonderful” (9)

He sought from the king of Tyre to send him a man, great in his skill and leadership; And he also sought that the materials to be used in building the house of the Lord, be of the best kinds, *‘for the temple which I am about to build is great and wonderful’* (9).

4- ASOLOMON GIVES A PLEDGE TO SUSTAIN THE WORKERS:

“And indeed I will give to your servants, the hewers who cut timber, twenty thousand kors of ground wheat, twenty thousand kors of barley, twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil” (10)

King Solomon pledged to be very generous in sustaining the workers. He promised Hiram that he will not provide the workers with just “bread and water”, but with an abundance of wheat, barley, oil, and wine. He promised, beside providing them with high wages, to care for their nutrition and their comfort; he will even provide them with wine.

5- A MESSAGE FROM THE KING OF TYRE TO SOLOMON:

“Then Hiram king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon: ‘Because the Lord loves His people, He has made you king over them’” (11)

The way Solomon, with wisdom, reverence, and honor, wrote to the king of Tyre,, had its impact on Hiram; who wrote him back congratulating the people of Israel for his wise reign; *“Because the Lord loves His people, He has made you king over them”* (11). He did not say: Because the Lord loves you, He made you king; but *“Because the Lord loves His people...”*. For the good leaders is a good gift from God to his holy and beloved people..

Hiram’s response to Solomon’s message revealed the extension of the knowledge of God among the nations; and tells of the reaction of the Gentiles to the gospel of Christ, and their happiness with it. We can say that Hiram here, prepared the way, symbolically, for the church of the Gentiles, in the following ways

- 1- Hiram, the king of Tyre took upon himself the role of Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, who with his household, and those assembled in his house, encountered Simon Peter, to listen to him, and to enjoy the grace of baptism
- 2- That work prepared the way for what Paul the apostle did, in his care for the uncircumcised Gentiles, and their response to his preaching. The response of Hiram befits the Gentiles, thirsty for the knowledge of the evangelic truth, and faith in it.

“Hiram also said :blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who made heaven and earth, for He has given king David a wise son, endowed with prudence and understanding, who will build a temple for the Lord, and a royal house for himself” (12)

Hiram testified that the Lord so loved His people to make Solomon reign over them; being the son of David the man of wisdom and knowledge; to build a house for the Lord, and a royal house for his kingdom. Was that not a prophecy about the testimony of the Gentiles to the true Solomon, the Lord of Glory, the Son Of David, the Wisdom of God, who established the church of the new covenant, an eternal house, a center of His heavenly kingdom?!

Here, Hiram sees Solomon, not only as a good gift from the Lord to His people, but also a good gift to his own father David: *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has given David a wise son, endowed with prudence and understanding”* (12). For the prudent son is a gift from God to his family.

Walking by the spirit of godliness and uprightness, thanks to the same spirit of David their king, the people of Israel had an impact on the surrounding nations like Tyre. On the contrary, when the people of Israel tended to worship the gods of the Gentiles around them, those nations were stirred up against them,

prevailed upon them and humiliated them. Whenever man does evil, evil itself will lead him to perdition, and deprive him of his honor and possibilities.

“And now I have sent a skillful man, endowed with understanding, Hiram my master craftsman” (13)

“ (the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre), skillful to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, purple and blue, fine linen and crimson, and to make any engraving and to accomplish any plan which may be given to him, with your skillful men and with the skillful men of my lord David your father” (14)

Hiram sent to Solomon a Skillful man having both Israeli and Gentile blood; his mother was a daughter of the tribe of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre. That skillful man refers to the church of the new covenant that embraces members of Jewish origin and others of gentile origin.

“Now therefore, the wheat, the barley, the oil, and the wine, which my Lord has spoken of, let him send to his servants” (15)

“And we will cut wood from Lebanon, as much as you need, we will bring it to you in rafts by sea to Joppa, and you will carry it up to Jerusalem” (16)

A treaty was made between the two kings: the king of Tyre provides Solomon with all his needs, and brings them forth to Joppa; And Solomon provides the workers with all their needs (15 – 16). This treaty was mentioned in 1 Kings 5: 8-9.

7- THE ALIENS WHO WERE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL PARTAKE OF THE WORK:

“Then Solomon numbered all the aliens who were in the land of Israel, after the census which David his father had numbered them, and there were found to be one hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred” (17)

By the aliens are meant the Canaanites who used to inhabit the land before, and were not driven out by the Israelites.

“And he made seventy thousand of them bearers of burdens, eighty thousand hewers of stone in the mountain, and three thousand six hundred overseers to make the people work” (18)

Solomon used the aliens who had no right of inheritance in the promised land, as bearers of burdens and hewers of stones. Their number at that time was one hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred. They were not forced to work for free, but to earn their living for a generous wage, according to the commandment, saying: *“You shall not oppress a stranger”* (Exodus 23: 9)

Beside the goods that proceed from the fertile land of Canaan, the project of building the temple, the palace of the queen, and the other projects run by king Solomon, were source of income to many.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 2

WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO, O LORD?

- + You chose David, the youngest of his brothers;
Who was despised by his father and brothers;
But You never despise the little ones;
You took that young shepherd,
And let him sit on the throne to shepherd Your people;
Instead of the flute by which he used to gather the sheep around him,
You set him to be the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

- + You chose his son Solomon, a wise king in his youth;
You granted him wisdom from up high;
And together with wisdom, you granted him the riches, the glory, and
fame;
He put in his heart to build You a house;
You, whom heavens and earth could not contain.

- + You granted him wisdom, grace, and good ordinance;
He called the king of Tyre to partake of building Your house;
And he let the aliens partake of the work to Your account, O Holy One;
He found grace in the sight of all;
And by his wisdom he did not abuse their love;
But provided them with their needs for their work.

- + O, who chose David and Solomon;
And granted each of them the work that suits his talents and possibilities;
I wonder, what do You want me to do?
Open my eyes up to perceive my mission;
Hold my hand, and lead me, strengthen my depths;
Make me work, but not with slothfulness;
For by You I can do anything;
Grant me not to pervert to the right nor to the left;

But by Your Holy Spirit, I would commit myself to walk along the royal path;

Be my Leader, my Helper, and my Refuge;

So as not to cease working according to Your holy will.

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CHAPTER 3

BUILDING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The two books of the kings give a fuller account of the building of the house of the Lord, than here in the books of the chronicles.

1-	The place and the time of building the temple	1 - 2
2-	The dimensions and the decorations of the temple	3 - 9
3-	The two cherubs in the Most Holy Place	10 - 13
4-	The curtain (the veil) of the temple	14
5-	The pillars	15 - 17

A warning

1- THE PLACE AND THE TIME OF BUILDING THE TEMPLE:

In our commentary of the book of Exodus (chapter 25), we saw that, according to father Methodeus: The Jews prophesied about what we shall be; while we prophesy about the heavenlies; for the tabernacle (the temple) is a symbol of the church; while the church is the symbol of the heavenlies.

“Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah

the Jebusite, the place provided by David” (1)

This chapter is the only place in the Holy Book, where the location of the temple was proclaimed – Mount Moriah – where Abraham was ready to offer his son Isaac a sacrifice to God (Genesis 22: 2).

The temple was erected in the location where the first symbol or a practical reference to the sacrifice of the only begotten Son, took place; offered by the Father for the salvation of

humanity. That is the foundation and the goal of the house of God, namely the enjoyment of the sacrifice of redemption, offered by the Lord Christ.

- + According to his faith, Abraham got attached to the commandment of the Word of God; and with a ready mind, he offered to God as sacrifice, his only beloved son. And what would bring pleasure to the heart of God, is to offer to the account of all Abraham's descendants, His only begotten Son a sacrifice for our redemption.

(St.

Erinaos)

The choice of this location reveals how God looks at His holy house in the midst of His people; as the house of the Passover sacrifice, that grants the believer a joyful salvation.

Solomon did not have to search for a convenient location for the temple; for he already had the location ahead (1 chronicles 21: 18;; 22: 1); His father intended to give him the peace of mind; not to waste his time; and to spare him any probable controversies between his leaders as to the best place to erect it.

The choice of the location of the temple was based on the following criteria:

- a- It is in Jerusalem; the city chosen by God to put His name on. And heaven was called "the higher Jerusalem" (Galatians 4: 26)
- b- On Mount Moriah; where Abraham was ready to offer his only son Isaac a burnt offering to God (Genesis 22: 2); and where God provided Abraham with a ram to offer instead of his son Isaac. As it was a symbol of the sacrifice of the Lord Christ, it was befitting to build the house of the Lord upon the atonement sacrifice of Christ on behalf of the whole world.
- c- In that location the Lord appeared to David and answered him with fire (1 Chronicles 21: 18, 26). And there, David offered a sacrifice as an atonement on the sin he has committed.

- d- David purchased the lot by his own money, and refused to offer a sacrifice on a site given free to him. He purchased it through a divine inspiration.
- e- The temple was set on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite; to let the Gentiles perceive that He is God of all mankind, and not confined to the Jews alone.
- f- In the Jewish tradition there came a story concerning that location, saying that two brothers who were living in the vicinity, one was married with children, and the other a bachelor. Out of love for his unmarried brother, and feeling that he was in need of help to prepare for his coming wedding, the married one used to carry some produce from his storehouse, and bring them secretly to the storehouse of his brother. At the same time the bachelor, out of love for his married brother, and feeling that he was in need of help with his heavy family burden, used to do the same thing every evening. Every morning each one of them noticed that his storehouse remained the same. And on a certain evening, the two encountered one another carrying produce to his brother's storehouse. When they realized the beautiful fact, they embraced one another and cried for joy. In that location of brotherly love, God chose to set His holy house, the house of divine and brotherly love.

“He began building on the second day of the second month of the fourth year of his reign” (2)

The actual work did not start before the fourth year of the reign of king Solomon (2). Even though the location was fixed, and so was the architectural plan; yet the project was so huge and in need of elaborate preparations; beside the enormous number of workers, who needed some time to be all available.

2- THE DIMENSIONS AND THE DECORATIONS OF THE TEMPLE:

“The foundation Solomon laid for building the temple of God was sixty cubits long and twenty cubits wide (using the cubits of the old standard).(3)

“ The portico at the front of the temple was twenty cubits long across the width of the building, and twenty cubits high. He overlaid the inside with pure gold” (4)

As the dimensions of the building were already set by king David, there was no need to change them. It is to be noticed that the height was great compared to the length and width. The height was 120 cubits, while the length and the width were each only 20 cubits.

The height of the sanctuary was 30 cubits; while the main court before it, which was not mentioned in the book of the kings, was a separate high building before the sanctuary.

“He paneled the main hall with pine and covered it with fine gold and decorated it with palm tree and chain designs” (5)

As to the decorations of the temple, although the woodwork was extremely magnificent; It was however covered with fine gold (5). the great house was paneled by pine wood, covered with fine gold; and decorated with palm trees and chain designs.

According to the scholar Origen, the wood, used in the house of the Lord was of a kind resistant to pests, which refers to knowledge or chastity that never gets old nor corrupt.

The gold, as we have already repeated in our commentary on the Holy Book, refers to heaven; the palm tree to victory, and the chains to unity. The golden chains refer to the prominent feature of the church of Christ, that bears the heavenly thought, perpetually enjoys the life of victory in her strife against the devil and sin; and the unity of her members together as one body for the One Head – the Lord Christ -- as a holy heavenly bride.

According to the scholar Origen, the gold refers to faith that makes the heart heaven, hence it refers to the heavenlies; And it refers as well, to the saints, being heaven, and God dwells in their hearts. He says: [If you believe, you will offer your heart and mind as gold! ... That is why, Moses, representing the spiritual law, proclaims: *“From what you have, take (an offering)”* (Exodus 35: 5)... If you can take from what the things you have, they are, therefore inside you; namely, we can offer the Lord of our feelings, words, etc.]

And according to father Methodeus, gold refers to the life of virginity, saying: [God commanded to make the articles to be used in the Most Holy place, of gold, for two reasons: The first for it never rusts; and the second is that its color is close to that of the sun rays; by which it suits the virginity that bears no defilement nor wrinkles; but always shines with the light of the Word. Through it we can stand close to God, inside the Most Holy place, before the curtain (the veil), with undefiled hands, offering acceptable prayers to the Lord, sweet fragrance of incense in the golden censors of the twenty-four elders, which are the prayers of the saints.

“He adorned the temple with precious stones; and the gold he used was gold of Parvaim” (6)

“He overlaid the ceiling beams, the door frames the walls, and the doors of the temple with gold; and he carved cherubim on the walls” (7)

As the Most Holy place represents the heavenly throne of God, There are the two statues of the cherubim; and the veil is decorated with the images of the cherubim (14); who would never allow entrance to the throne of God except to those bearing the heavenly features. Even the walls are decorated by images of the cherubim, because the house of God is a second heaven.

“He built the Most Holy Place, its length corresponding to the width of the temple – twenty cubits long and twenty cubits wide. He overlaid the inside with six hundred talents of fine gold” (8)

“The gold nails weighed sixty shekels. He also overlaid the upper parts with gold” (9)

All things in the temple were overlaid with gold.

If the temple refers to the heart of the believer, according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”* (1 Corinthians 3 16. And gold refers to the heavenlies, it is, therefore, befitting of the believer to have his whole inner life and behavior, bear a heavenly feature.

The Most Holy place, with its twenty cubits long, and twenty cubits wide, is wholly overlaid with gold; even the nails are of gold, and its upper parts are overlaid with gold.

The temple, being a symbol of heaven, all its walls, doors, and foundations, are adorned with precious stones and pearls (Revelations 21: 18-21).

3- THE TWO CHERUBIM IN THE MOST HOLY PLACE:

“In the Most Holy Place he made a pair of sculptured cherubim and overlaid them with gold” (10)

The word ‘cherubim’, meaning (knowledge); According to the scholar Origen, the two cherubs are described as being golden; as they refer to the abundance of the heavenly knowledge.

“The total wingspan of the cherubim was twenty cubits. One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long and touched the wing of the other cherub” (11)

“Similarly, one wing of the second cherub was five cubits long and touched the other temple wall, and its other wing, also five cubits long, touched the wing of the first cherub” (12)

If the wings of the two cherubs were together twenty cubits long, five cubits for every wing, the two wings are spread to occupy the whole width of the Most Holy place.. If the Most Holy place represents the heaven, into which no one would enter except those who bear the feature of heaven, it is befitting of all men, encountering the Lord, to enjoy the heavenly features, and dust would have no place in their hearts.

“The wings of these cherubim extended twenty cubits. They stood on their feet facing the main hall” (13)

Before the building of the temple, the two cherubs over the ark of the covenant were relatively small; but now they are so big to fill all the width of the Most Holy place. The two cherubs were standing with their faces directed toward the ark of the covenant; to appear as servants of the unseen God; as though calling all believers, priests, Levites, and people, to partake of their worship of God, and not to worship them instead.

3- **THE CURTAIN (THE VEIL) OF THE TEMPLE:**

“He made the curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarn and fine linen, with cherubim worked into it” (14)

The curtain veils the Most Holy place from the sanctuary; revealing the need of humanity, even those who worship God, to reconcile with God; to be able to cross over to the heavenlies. That was realized by the cross of the Lord Christ, when the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27: 51); not by human hand, but by the work of the Savior Himself.

The curtain was made of several materials and diverse colors: blue, purple, and crimson, and of fine linen (14). The blue refers to heaven; the purple is worn by kings; the crimson is the color of blood; and the white linen refers to purity. It is therefore befitting of the believer to bear the heavenly feature, and to walk as a king of authority; not to fear the hosts of darkness, to enjoy the blood of the Lord Christ for the remission of sins, and to live in purity and chastity.

We have already talked about the symbolism of the blue, the purple, the crimson, and the linen, in our commentary on chapter 25 of the book of Exodus.

According to the scholar Origen, the purple refers to the shine of love, as well as to fire. The true Christian bears the fire of the Holy Spirit in his heart, that lightens his way, and burns the thorns that strangle the soul.

The crimson refers to the blood of the Lord Christ, the Savior; to our testimony to Him even to blood; for according to the apostle: *“for Your sake, we are killed all day long”* (Psalm 44: 22).. The crimson used to refer to shedding the blood of believers, whether in the eras of martyrdom, or in bringing them to death, daily, for the sake of the Lord.

The twined yarn of fine linen, refer to the body. Being twined refers to being disciplined and controlled; according to the saying of the apostle Paul: *“I discipline my body, and bring it into subjection”* (1 Corinthians 9: 27). every control and discipline of the body in Jesus Christ is an offering to the house of the Lord.

4- **THE TWO PILLARS:**

“In the front of the temple he made two pillars, which together, were thirty-five cubits long, each with a capital on top measuring five cubits” (15)

“He made interwoven chains and put them on top of the pillars. He also made a hundred pomegranates and attached them to the chains” (16)

“He erected the pillars in the front of the temple, one to the south, and one to the north. The one to the south he named Jakin, and the one to the north Boaz” (17)

Two pillars were erected in front of the temple, each 18 cubits high (1 Kings 7: 15); called Jakin (namely the foundation), and Boaz (namely the power). Which, according to some, refer to the house of David established by the Lord (2 Samuel 7), and will stand fast by the power of God. The chains on the top of the pillars, refer to the unity of the whole nation, even though formed of twelve tribes.

If the unity in the Old Testament was symbolized by chains connecting the pillars; the Lord gave us His body, to make all, diverse organs in one body, with one Head – our Lord Jesus Christ.

A WARNING:

Although Solomon enjoyed several privileges, like the wisdom, building the house of the Lord, and the other things, by which he seems as though he surpassed his father David; Yet, those privileges would eventually come to judge him, when he misused them. According to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, when Solomon was splendid, God sent fire and consumed his offering, a sign of accepting him and having pleasure with him. But once he started to sacrifice to the demons and idols, He cast him away from His face.... Now, why did God who knows everything choose Judas as His disciple? ... And why did He create Satan, the opponent of the divine truth? ...He said;

He created him while being beautiful, pure, blameless, meek, upright, and full of love toward the Son of God;

After choosing him, fitting, and full of beauty, he eventually changed, lost his beauty, and became repulsive.

If you say that, knowing for sure ahead that he would change; why did He choose him for such a temporary and non-abiding beauty?

Much could be said in this concern, if you listen to them with love and discernment. In case God, who searches the heart and mind, acts according to His prior knowledge, He would annul the ordinance of the exalted might.

He would not bring Adam forth into paradise; and would not command him not to eat from the tree (Genesis 2: 17)

He would not create Satan together with the angels; Nor would make the crafty serpent that led Eve astray (Genesis 3: 1).

That would have annulled the upright might of creation; and the world would not come into existence the way it did.

If He acted according to His prior knowledge, He would not conform the blasphemer in his mother's womb.

Nor would give the idol-worshipper the chance to see light; nor would, altogether, bring the non-believer into the world.

God, Knowledgeable in everything, brought Himself down to no knowledge, for the sake of His exalted mercies for His creation.

He created Adam, and despite knowing beforehand that he will disobey Him, He went ahead and created him

With His good intention, God brought him into paradise, despite knowing that he will not abide in it.

He strictly commanded him not to eat from the tree; And if He acted according to His prior knowledge, He would not command him.

Despite His prior knowledge that Satan is going to fall, God created him among the heavenly creatures

God gave the atheist a mouth and a tongue, although He knew that he will use them to blaspheme Him.

God brought Adam into paradise to stay there; but his exit from it is a result of his own sin.

Satan was created among Michael's folks, yet when he envied, he fell, and lost his freedom.

When God chose Judas, knowing beforehand that he will deliver Him, He likened His Father in His works;

When Judas was beautiful, the Lord assigned him to preach together with the other beautiful disciples and when he became a traitor, He put him among His crucifiers;

God His Father does not discard anyone as long as he is beautiful;

When Solomon was beautiful, God responded to his prayer, sent fire on his offering (1 chronicles 7: 1) ;But when he became a minister to the heathen sacrifices, He cast him away (1 Kings 11).

The Son of God promised Judas a throne (Matthew 19: 28); But when he denied Him, he brought him down, and the hanging rope was his wages (Matthew 27: 5).

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-

Serougi)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 3

SET YOUR AMAZING TEMPLE IN ME

- + Allow me, O Heavenly One, to wonder:
How were the feelings of the heavenly hosts;
As they saw You incarnate in the virgin womb for my sake?
Heaven is not pure in Your sight, O Holy One;
Heaven and earth could not contain You, O Infinite One!
The heavenly creatures could not perceive Your exalted secrets;
How did You descend to our earth; You whom all the heavenly hosts fear You;

- + You came down to set out of the men of dust, almost heavenly creatures
To bring us up from the trash;
And by Your Holy Spirit, to make us a temple for Yourself;

- + Solomon built for You a temple on Mount Moriah;
Where Abraham offered his son Isaac a burnt offering, by intention and love.
And where David offered a sacrifice to seek Your forgiveness, and to save Your
people from the plague;
Here You are, the Lord of Solomon and his Savior, set Your temple inside me;
By Your Holy Spirit, You turn my depths into a new Mount Moriah;
And even to set out of my heart a new Golgotha;
To proclaim the power of Your cross, and the gladness of Your resurrection in me;

- + Solomon paneled Your house with pine wood, and overlaid it with fine gold;
And here You overlay my heart with un-corruptible virginity;
And turn my nature of dust into an almost heavenly nature;

- + Solomon decorated Your house with extremely beautiful precious stones
And here You are, adorn my soul with Your Holy Spirit;
To grant me the fellowship of Your amazing nature;
To become, by Your grace, a living icon of you
To take from what is Yours, and give me;

To grant me love, joy, peace, chastity, and goodness;
To shine Your light in me, to scatter the darkness.

+ No man could enter the most Holy place;
Except the High Priest once a year;
And here You are, dwelling in me, together with your heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit;
How great is your love for humanity!
You raised her from her fall, up to exalted glories;
You prepared her to enjoy sonhood to You;
And Here you are, preparing for her an endless inheritance;
Grant our hearts, minds, emotions, and feelings;
To become a choir that unceasingly praise Your name;
To partake of the life of the heavenly hosts;
What an amazing temple, You made by Your own hands!



CHAPTER 4

THE METAL FURNITURE AND THE HOLY ARTICLES

The furnishing of the temple came in 1 Kings 7: 13 – 51), It had its importance in the temple of the Lord; and, at the same time, it bore symbols that touch the life of the believers in the new covenant. Without that furnishings, set by the Lord, it was not possible for the priests to practice their work that would bring pleasure to the Lord.

1-	The bronze altar	1
2-	The Sea of cast bronze	2 - 6
3-	The lampstands and the tables	7 - 8
4-	The doors for the priests' court	9 - 10
5-	The holy articles and others	11 – 22

Some may wonder, what shall we benefit from our study of the holy temple, the metal furnishing, and the holy articles?

The scholar Origen gives us the answer to this question in his talk about the tabernacle of meeting and its furnishings, which also apply to the temple.

- + Everyone of us can build a tabernacle of meeting for God in his own soul. And as the early fathers said, that the tabernacle of meeting represents the whole world; Every individual bears the image of the world. Why then, can each of us consummate the image of the tabernacle inside himself?

The pillars of virtues have to be erected inside him; which refer to longsuffering, and prudence. For man sometimes may look as one with perseverance, yet without prudence; Such a person has pillars, but not silver. He who suffers because of the Word of God, and preaches it with courage, is adorned with the silver pillars, and is protected by them.

Palaces inside you could also be open wider, when the heart is open; according to the words uttered by the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, saying: "*You also should be open*" (2 Corinthians 6: 13). Man could also strengthen himself by 'bars', when he is bound to the unity of love.

And he can stand on the silver foundations, when he is founded upon the steadfast prophetic and apostolic Word of God..

He can adorn the tops of the pillars with capitals, with faith in Christ; for "*The head of every man is Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11: 3).

Man can also set ten courts in his soul, when he goes deep, not just in one, two, or three words in the law; but when he enjoy the openness of the spiritual meaning of the ten commandments of the law; when he give the fruition of the spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness; particularly when he adds 'Love' to all these; when his soul is alert: "*when he will not give sleep to her eyes, or slumber to her eyelids, until he finds a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob*" (Psalm 132: 4-5)

I say: Let a steadfast altar is set in his soul, on which prayers are raised, to enjoy the mercy of God; on which pride, as a well-fed calf is sacrificed by the knife of moderation; anger is slaughtered as a ram; and all evil pleasures are slaughtered as goats.

Let him know how to keep for the priests the right limb, the breast, and the jaw from the sacrifice; as a reference to the good deeds of the right hand (nanely not doing any kind of evil); the breast refers to the upright heart, and the dedicated mind; while the jaw represents the uttered Word of God.

Let man perceive the necessity of putting the "**lampstand**" in his inner sanctuary, perpetually lighting its lamps; And of girdling his waist, to become like the faithful servant who waits for the return of his master from the wedding (Luke 12: 35-36); About these lamps, the Lord

Himself says: *“The lamp of the body is the eye”* (Matthew 6: 22). Let him put the lampstand at the south end facing the north; For when the lamps are lighted, namely when the inner heart flares up, it would perpetually watch toward the north, to anticipate what come from the north, when *“He saw a boiling pot, and it is facing away from the north; ... For out of the north, calamity shall break forth “* (Jeremiah 1L 13-14). Let man, therefore, be always alert, anticipate the deception of his enemy, and always ready to confront his wars, whenever he starts his attacks; according to the words of the apostle Peter: *“Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5: 8).

Let him put **“the table, with twelve loaves of bread”** on the north, directed toward the south. The bread refers to the apostolic word in number, power, and continuity of use, according God’s command to the prophet Moses that bread has to be perpetually put before the lord; and man has to direct his sight on the south in anticipation of the coming of the Lord, *“For the comes from Teman”*, as it is written, which is in the south.:

Let him put **“the altar of incense”** in the depths of his heart, to say together with the apostle: *“We are the sweet fragrance of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 2: 15).

Let every man have an **“ark of covenant”** where he keeps **the two tablets of the law**, to meditate in God’s law day and night (Psalm 1: 2); Let his mind be, like the ark of the covenant, and like a library that includes the books of God; for the prophets have **“blessed those who keep His commandments”** in their memory (Psalm 105 (106): 3).

Let him, as well, keep in his heart **“the pot of manna”**, a reference to the beauty and sweetness of the understanding the Word of God; And let him also keep **“the rod of Aaron”**, which gave flowers of upright chastisement; a reference to the teachings of priesthood.

Beside all those heavenly things,, let him put on **“the attire of the high priest”**, which is the best a man can do, namely taking upon himself the role of the high priest. which, according to some, refers to watching the heart; while to others, it is the reasonable thought of the mind. Whatever it is called, it would remain referring to that part of the soul that has the main

tendency toward God. Let us then, adorn this part by a long priesthood garment, that reaches down to cover the feet, and the whole body; a reference to be wholly covered with the attire of chastity. Let him also put on the outer robe, adorned with precious stones, a reference to the good deeds: *“that men may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5: 16). The high priest should cover up his private parts of his body, *“to be holy, both in body and in spirit”* (1 Corinthians 7: 34); and pure both in thought and works. He should put bells on the lower fringe of his robe so that, according to the Holy Book, *“its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out”* (Exodus 28: 35). Those bells, in my opinion have the goal that he should not keep silent concerning the last days of life and the end of the world, but, by continuous ringing, they are as though debate and talk, according to the words: *“In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin”* (Sirach 7: 36). This way, our inner man is adorned to become like the high priest of God, worthy to enter, not only into the sanctuary, but even into the Most Holy Place, and to approach the throne of mercy. with the cherubim.

While the sanctuary refers to the holy life in the present world, the Most Holy Place, into which the high priest enters once a year, refers to the crossing over to the heavenlies, where the throne of mercy is, and where He who sits on the cherubim, where God proclaims Himself in the pure heart; He who says: *“For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17: 21)

(The scholar

Origen)

1-

THE BRONZE ALTAR:

“Moreover, he made a bronze altar; twenty cubits was its length, twenty cubits was its width, and ten cubits was its height” (1)

He who approaches the temple from the east, will find the entrance into the court of the priests. To that entrance, the people used to come with their sacrifices and offerings which they bring forth to the Lord. On the right hand toward the south, there was the bronze altar,

on which fire has been perpetually ablaze, and the priests offering the sacrifices (Exodus 27: 1-8; 38: 1-7) That bronze altar, here, was analogous to a similar Mosaic altar in Gibeon (1: 6; Exodus 38: 30); yet much larger.

The things made of bronze were: the altar of burnt offerings (1); the Sea of cast bronze; the lavers to contain the water (2-6); the cover of the doors of the courts of the priest (19), and certain articles of the altar, etc. (10-18).

The bronze altar, on which a multitude of sacrifices were offered and burnt; was not mentioned in the book of the kings; and was much larger than the one built by Moses in the tabernacle of meeting, which was not more than five square cubits; while the bronze altar in the temple of Solomon was twenty square cubits; on account of that, with the great increase, in the number of the children of Israel, and their riches; there was hope that they would be, as well, more godly, through their experience of fellowship with God all along the successive generations.. Because it was expected that the sacrificed would be more numerous than before, it was made so wide to accommodate a greater number of them. The way God has widened their frontiers, it was befitting of them to make His altar bigger; For what you offer should be according to what you get.

The altar was ten cubits high, to let the people who worship in the outer court see the burnt offerings, and that their hearts be so impressed by what they see, to offer repentance on their sins; saying: [For the sake of God's mercy, I did not perish; and this sacrifice is received by God as an atonement for my sins]. And by that they would probably be led to recognize the great sacrifice that is to be offered at the fullness of time – the sacrifice of the Lord Christ.... They would probably soar up in the heavenlies, when they see the smoke ascending from the burnt sacrifices.

The Holy Book did not say how they ascended, carrying the sacrifices, up to the high altar; but according to some they must have done, the way they would ascend up hill, without using a staircase, which is forbidden by the law (Exodus 20: 26).

In the sermons of the scholar Origen, on the book of Joshua, he presents to us a living portrait of the ministry of the altar, and the sacrifices in the old covenant, as a symbol of what was later fulfilled in the sacrifice of the Lord Christ on the cross.

+ If we understand the way Moses died, we may perceive how the Lord Christ reigns. When you see the desolation of Jerusalem; the altar without sacrifices nor offerings, and with neither priests nor Levites, When you see all that, you may say that Moses, the servant of God has died..

When you notice that no one comes three times a year to stand before the face of the Lord; offers offerings in the temple, slays the lamb of Passover, eats unleavened bread, offers the firstfruit, dedicates the firstborn; When you see all that you may say that Moses the servant of God has died.

But when you see how the Gentiles entered into faith, the churches are built, the altar consecrated by the precious blood of Jesus Christ instead of the blood of the sacrifices; and perceive that the priests and the Levites are no longer preoccupied with the blood of bulls and calves, but with the Word of God through the grace of the Holy Spirit; When you see all that you may say that the Lord Christ has taken the leadership instead of Moses

When you see Christ, our new Passover, slain, when you eat the unleavened bread of salvation; and you see how the good land of the church gives fruition, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold, namely, the widows, the virgins, and the martyrs; When you see the people of Israel increase in number, those who are born, not out of the will nor the body of man, but from God to become the children of God; and those who were scattered are gathered together into One in His Person; ... When you see keeping the law of the Sabbath, not by forsaking work, but by uprooting sin; When all these things are consummated, you will then perceive that Moses the servant of God has died; and that Christ the Son of God has the leadership

Origen)

2-

THE SEA OF CAST BRONZE:

“Then he made the Sea of cast bronze, ten cubits from one brim to the other; it was completely round. Its height was five cubits, and a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference” (2)

On the left hand side of the entrance, toward the south side of the court of the priests, there was the Sea of cast bronze, instead of the small laver which was set in the court of the tabernacle of meeting (Exodus 30: 17-21' 38: 8).. It stood on twelve oxen statutes; probably referring to the twelve tribes of Israel (2 Kings 16: 17); arranged in groups , each of three statutes of oxen, each group facing different direction.

The priests were committed to have their hands and feet clean, lest they would die (exodus 30: 20).

The drinking water in the Holy Book refers to the Holy Spirit (John 7: 37-39); whereas the water for washing refers to the Word of God (Psalm 119: 9; John 15: 3; Ephesians 5: 25-27).

Working in the temple, the priests need water to wash their bodies, and need the Word of God to wash their hearts by the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of purity, sanctity, and the continuous renewal. That is what the Lord Christ proclaimed by washing the feet of His disciples before letting them have communion in His holy body and precious blood on the great Thursday of the Bascha week.

The Sea of cast bronze was like the font of baptism in the church of the new covenant. It is befitting of us to *“purge our consciences from dead works by the true repentance, to serve*

the living God" (Hebrew 9: 14); beside "*purifying our hands and hearts*" (James 4: 8); in order to hear the Lord Christ, saying: "*He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet*" and will be renewed by repentance whenever he come to serve (John 13: 10)

According to the Jewish historian Josephus it was called a "Sea" because of its great size; to the rabbinical interpreters it was large enough for the priests to bathe in it), and to others it is so called in reference to its symbolic work, referring to the early water in the process of creation, over which the Spirit of God hovered.

The altar and the Sea are two symbols of the heavenly altar not made by human hand.

"And under it was the likeness of oxen encircling it all around, ten to a cubit, all the way around the sea. The oxen were cast in two rows, when it was cast" (3)

"It stood on twelve oxen: three looking toward the north, three looking toward the west, three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east; the sea was set upon them; and

all their back parts pointed inward" (4)

"It was a handbreadth thick; and its brim was shaped like the brim of a cup, like a lily blossom. I contained three thousand baths" (5)

"He also made ten lavers, and put five on the right side and five on the left, to wash in them; such things as they offered for the burnt offering they would wash in them, but the Sea was for

the priests to wash in" (6)

There were ten bronze carts adorned by images of lions, oxen, and cherubim; and each cart carries a laver with a capacity of 230 gallons of water. These carts with their lavers, placed in the priests' court on the right, set on wheels for easy movement, were used to wash the sacrifices, and probably for cleansing the temple in general.. The dirty water is then poured in a convenient place, and replaced with clean water from the Sea of cast bronze.

Those carts that carried the lavers were magnificently adorned with beautiful designs, for the priests to perceive that God sees beauty in the sanctity and purity; and that there is no separation between the two of them (Exodus 28: 2; Psalm 29: 2; 69: 6; 110: 3).

In the tabernacle of meeting there was only one laver, on account of that all the priests belonged to the Tribe of Levi; and even the kings were not allowed to practice the priesthood work. But in the temple, referring to the new covenant, there were ten lavers: five on the right side and five on the left; on account of that the priest (of the new covenant) do not belong to a specific tribe, nor to a specific nation; for, in Jesus Christ, there is no Jew or Greek; but all the priests are hidden in the heavenly highest Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The way the priests should wash themselves, so should the sacrifices be washed. ... We are committed to elaborately cast away every evil thought.

3- THE GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS AND THE TABLES:

“And he made ten lampstands of gold according to their design, and set them in the temple, five on the right side and five on the left” (7)

As the place was spacious, wherever no daylight could reach, was in need of those lampstands, that were done according to the same design in the tabernacle of meeting.. (The historian Josephus exaggerated to claim that there were 10,000 lampstands in the temple).

In the days of the prophet Moses there was only one lampstand, namely the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch) The addition of more lampstands refer to the addition of more holy books; by which the light shines more, and the lampstands, namely the churches increased in number (Revelation 1: 20). Moses established one lampstand – the Jewish church. But in the temple of the gospel, they multiplied, not on account of the increase of believers among the Jews, but of the multitude of the churches among the Gentiles and peoples.

“He also made ten tables, and placed them in the temple, five on the right side and five on the left. And he made one hundred bowls of gold” (8)

In (1 Kings 7: 48) only one table for showbread was mentioned; for the goal of the book was to confirm the setting of the kingdom of Israel to prepare the way for the coming of the Savior Messiah. Whereas in 2 chronicles 4: 8), it refers to ten tables: five on the right side and five on the left. The church of the new covenant, as a symbol of heaven, opens her doors before the new Israel, in which the Jews dissolve among the Gentiles. Christ presents Himself a heavenly bread to the peoples, coming from the East and from the West; namely from the end of the world to its other end, without partiality to a specific nation.

Twelve loaves of bread were probably put on every table. For the larger the house of the Lord, the larger the ministry becomes; namely in my Father's house there are enough bread for all the household.

4- THE DOORS OF THE PRIESTS' COURT:

“Furthermore he made the court of the priest, and the great court and doors for the court; and he overlaid these doors with bronze” (9)

The doors of the priests' court were overlaid with bronze (9), to protect them from the impact of the atmosphere. (the bronze doors were mentioned in psalm 107: 16).

“He set the Sea on the right side, to the southeast” (10)

6- THE HOLY ARTICLES AND OTHERS:

“Then Hiram made the pots and the shovels and the bowls. So Hiram finished doing the work that he was to do for king Solomon for the house of God.” (11)

“the two pillars and the bowl-shaped capitals that were on top of the two pillars; the two networks covering the two bowl-shaped capitals which were on top of the pillars” (12)

Here we see a short account of the articles that were made of bronze.

Here, as well, we may notice the following:

- a- Hiram was a skillful, elaborate, and committed craftsman, who finished doing the work that he was assigned to do for king Solomon for the house of God.(11), he was counted as the father of all the skillful craftsmen
- b- Being very generous, Solomon commanded him to make articles of every kind and in such great abundance, that if any was damaged it could be readily replaced. And the bronze remaining could not be used in any other goal, for it was dedicated to the temple..
- c- There were generous donations to which Solomon himself contributed

“four hundred pomegranates for the two networks (two rows of pomegranates for each network, to cover the two bowl-shaped capitals that were on the pillars)” (13)

“He also made carts and the lavers on the carts” (14)

“the Sea and the twelve oxen under it” (15)

“also the pots, the shovels, the forks -- and all their articles Hiram his master craftsman made of burnished bronze for king Solomon for the house of the Lord” (16)

“In the plain of Jordan the king had them cast in clay molds, between Succoth and Zeredah” (17)

“And Solomon had all these articles made in such great abundance that the weight of the bronze was not determined” (18)

“Thus Solomon had all the furnishings made for the house of God; the altar of gold, and the tables on which was the showbread” (19)

“The golden altar” was set in front of the curtain that separates the Most Holy Place from the sanctuary. On it the priests used to offer incense in the morning and the evening (Exodus 30: 1-10; 37: 25-29).

Rising the incense refers to raising prayers to God (Psalm 141: 1-2; Revelation 5: 8; Luke 1: 8-10). Its composition was given by the Lord to the prophet Moses to offer in the tabernacle and the temple, and could not be duplicated for any other purpose (Exodus 30: 34-38).

On the great day of atonement, the high priest uses the blood to cleanse and purify the altar (Exodus 30: 10), For we cannot approach God without the atoning blood of the Lord Christ; and except by pure hands and heart (Psalm 24: 3-5).

It probably was made of great size as it happened with the bronze altar.

Only here in the Holy Book it was referred to a multitude of the tables of showbread.

“the lampstands with their lamps of pure gold to burn in the prescribed manner in front of the inner sanctuary” (20)

“with the flowers and the lamps and the wick-trimmers of gold, of purest gold;” (21)

“the trimmers, the bowls, and the ladles, and the censers of pure gold. As for the entry of the sanctuary, its inner doors to the Most Holy Place, and the doors of main hall of the temple,

were of gold” (22).

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 4

HOW GREAT IS THE WORK OF YOUR HAND IN ME, O LORD

- + Who could build Your temple but You?
Who could furnish it except by Your grace?
Set inside me the silver pillars of virtue
For Your Words are the pillars on which the building of my souls are set;
I wish I am adorned by You, O wholly beautiful Word of God.

- + Widen the size of Your temple in me;
To become the object of Your pleasure

Let it be large enough to accommodate, by love, You and all my brethren;
So that hate, envy, or pride would have no place in my thoughts;
And not a single word of revile would come out of my mouth.

+ Set a golden lampstand in me;
Shine by the light of Your righteousness, to scatter the darkness in me;
For by Your light, the prince of the kingdom of darkness would not be able to crawl into me.

+ Set in me the table of showbread;
So that I would not be fed by the love and pleasures of this world;
But enjoy and be satisfied by the bread of the angels;
Let me be nourished by Your life-giving body and Your precious blood;
To enjoy the eternal life;

+ Let the sweet fragrance of incense ascend up to heaven;
Let my prayers be well received by You;
Let them bear Your sweet fragrance and enter into Your divine throne.

+ Receive my life a sacrifice of love, a perfect burnt offering before You;
Having nothing to offer You on my own;
Grant me to offer from what You have given me;
Sanctify my emotions, feelings, and words;
To offer love as a sacrifice well received by You.

+ Let all my energies, and talents, become holy articles for You;
Let them never cease ministering, worshipping, and praising You

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CHAPTER 5

DELIVERING THE TEMPLE TO THE LORD

Now it was the time for the Lord to receive His house as an offering from the whole congregation: from the king, the leaders, the priests, the ministers, and the whole people. The Lord received it in a cloud (13-14); as though the congregation have opened their hearts before the Lord, who came to them on a cloud, to proclaim His presence in His house, and among His people.

The building of the temple of the Lord was consummated, and in it the consecrated furnishings were put to minister to the Lord.

1- All the articles dedicated by king David were brought into the temple

1

2- The ark of the covenant brought into the house of the Lord

2 - 10

3- Singing thanksgiving to the Lord

11 - 12

4- A cloud and the glory of the Lord filled the house of God

13 – 14

1- ALL THE ARTICLES DEDICATED BY KING DAVID WERE BROUGHT INTO THE TEMPLE:

Solomon cared to bring the ark of the covenant from the city of David to the great house of the Lord that he prepared. The author does not mention the bronze altar set by Solomon in the wilderness; for another bigger bronze altar was set for the temple.

When the ark of the covenant found its rest in the house of the Lord. The priests retracted the poles from the ark, , so that the ends of the poles of the ark could be seen from the holy place; a reference to that the journey of the wilderness came to an end.

The ark of the covenant refers to the Lord Christ who dwelt among us by His incarnation, to bring us forth to heaven, where our souls would settle down and find comfort in Him; He is in us being a holy temple for Him; and by His salvation work, he set out of us a new earth and a new heaven, where His righteousness dwells in us.

“So all the work that Solomon had done for the house of the Lord was finished, and Solomon brought in all the things which his father David had dedicated: the silver, the Gold and all the furnishings. And he put them in the treasuries of the house of God” (1)

The book used every chance to refer to David as the one who prepared everything possible for the house of the Lord.

All the holy articles, beside the gold and silver, dedicated for the house of the Lord were put in the treasuries of the temple; with no need for any celebration thereof on account of that it is the temple that sanctifies the gold, and not the gold sanctifies the temple (Matthew 22: 17)

Solomon did not take anything of which his father David had dedicated to the temple, nor of what the leaders or the people have donated, to put in the treasuries of the royal palace, to use it in the time of need.

2- THE ARK OF THE COVENANT BROUGHT INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

“Now Solomon assembled Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel in Jerusalem, that they might bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord up from the city of David, which is Zion” (2)

It was befitting to bring the ark of the Lord into the temple with due reverence. Indeed a multitude of articles were made in larger sizes according to the size of the temple, and the largely increased size of the ministry from what it has been in the tabernacle of meeting; But, concerning the ark of the covenant, the cover, and the two cherubim on the cover, they all stayed as they were; on account of that God's presence and grace, would never change with the size of the place of worship (the temple or the church), nor with the number of the worshippers, whatever the material possibilities of the place of worship are. The Lord Christ confirmed that if two or three get together in his name, he will be among them, even if they are two or three thousand.

The ark of the covenant was brought into the temple with the attendance of a great crowd of the elders of Israel, who most probably came in reverence and in appropriate attire (2-4).

“Therefore, all the men of Israel assembled together with the king at the feast, which was in the seventh month” (3)

“So all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the ark” (4)

“Then they brought up the ark, the tabernacle of meeting and all the furnishings that were in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites brought them up” (5)

Together with the ark of the covenant they brought up all the holy articles that were in the tabernacle of meeting, which were not cast away, nor used to make other articles. Although some of them were most probably too small to use under the new circumstances, they were preserved for memorandum, for they were sanctified to the Lord. The ark of the covenant, the tabernacle of meeting, and the holy articles were brought forth to the temple in a huge procession; for which Solomon assembled Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel

“Also King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who were assembled with him before the ark were sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be counted or numbered for multitude” (6)

“Then the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the Most Holy Place, under the wings of the cherubim” (7)

The Levites carried the ark of the covenant to the temple. But bringing it into the Most Holy Place was the task of the priests, where they alone, were allowed to enter and not the Levites.

“For the cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles” (8)

“And the poles extended so that the ends of the poles of the ark could be seen from the holy place, in front of the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen from the outside.

And they are there to this day” (9)

The poles were retracted, on account of that the ark will be not be moved any more. Furthermore retracting the poles refers to rest; for the Lord Christ finds comfort in the hearts open up for Him as though He is in His temple. Preparing a

place for Him in our hearts, being His kingdom, He would settle down in them, and He would grant us, as well to settle down in His heavenly kingdom which He is preparing for us.

The Lord longed for His ark of the covenant to settle down in His holy temple; The apostle says: *“Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven’, that is to bring Christ from above, or ‘who will descend into the abyss’, that is to bring Christ up from the dead?”* (Romans 10: 6-7).

“And they are there to this day?” Not to the day this book is written, but to the day when the version from which the author quoted his report; was written and where it remained until the day Jerusalem was desolated (Psalm 137: 7).

“There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they had come out of Egypt” (10)

The rod of Aaron and the pot of the manna were no more there.

3- SINGING A SONG OF THANKSGIVING TO THE LORD:

“And it came to pass when the priests came out of the Most Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without keeping to their divisions)” (11)

The priests were sanctified as they came out of the sanctuary; They were committed to come out so that the true King Himself, would enter and proclaim His glory.. On that day not just one division of the priests was present; on account of that, being a public occasion, that would never happen again in the life of that generation of priests. Sacrifices were offered; and it was befitting of all the priests to partake of the celebration and behold the Lord's glory.

“and the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets –“ (12)

It was claimed that there were more than 4000 harps. The church of the new covenant inherited from the temple the rite of praising the Lord; with which the church – the daughter of Zion likens David the prophet and king, the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23: 1), finding in the psalms new depths of gladness, in the light of the salvation work on the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven. The apostle Paul defined the kingdom of the Lord as “*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 14: 17).

- + Whatever you do, do it well, for by this you praise God.
- + If the angels with their simple spiritual nature, are claimed to have tongues by which they sing praise to their God and Creator, and offer thanks without ceasing; How much more would the glorified bodies of men do it after the resurrection. For all the members of the glorified body will have tongues in their mouths, to give voice to their talking tongues; By that they would utter divine praises that flow with words of their love, and joy, that fill their feelings

- + Praising God is a specific task of the angels.

- + The psalms provide the soul with peace; ... appease in it the confusion of thoughts, and the accumulation of covetousness ... This book of psalms is the book of love;... a weapon against the devil; ... a cause of rest after the labor of the day; ... a comfort for the elderly; an exhortation of our holy rejoices and sorrows; ... a magnificent song is the voice of the church; ... a sweet fragrant incense.

- + The quiet praises bring the mind into a condition of joy and peace.

+ Whoever – whatever be his experience – can count the causes that would stir up joy in his heart, to make it flare with fire; and in whom the greatly zealous godly prayers stir up? But we can raise certain few points:

Singing a psalm sometimes stirs up in us a fervent prayer.

The harmonious melody of someone would sometimes stir up the idle minds to raise fervent supplications.

And the respectable way of uttering praise, would sometimes, flare the zeal of those around..

(Father Isaac)

3- A CLOUD AND THE GLORY OF GOD FILLED THE HOUSE:

“Indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: ‘For He is good; for His mercy endures forever’, that the house, the house of the Lord,

was filled with a cloud” (13)

This incident was not mentioned in the book of the kings.

Having been sanctified, the priests came out of the Most Holy Place. When one hundred and twenty of them sounded the trumpets, amid the praise of the singing Levites, the glory of the Lord dwelt like a cloud, before which the priest stood in awe, as though they were in heaven, and were filled with the fear of God together with an exalted love for Him.

God proclaimed His glory in the temple:

- 1- Not when animal sacrifices were offered , but when the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving that give pleasure to God were offered (Psalm 69: 31)
- 2- When one hundred and twenty priests partook of the praise by the three divisions of the Levite singers who stood on the east end of the altars (12), the nearest location to the congregation.
- 3- God proclaimed His glory when they celebrated God’s eternal goodness and mercies. The expression: *“For He is good, and His mercy endures forever”* was repeated 26 times in psalm 136; for God’s glory is proclaimed by His mercy and goodness.

When the cloud of glory filled the temple, it brought forth divine beauty, more so than the gold with which it was overlaid, or the precious stones with which it was adorned. Nevertheless, that glory is not to be compared to the glory that will be proclaimed by preaching the gospel (2 Corinthians 3: 8-10).

By the cloud that dwelt upon, and filled the house of the Lord, the Lord proclaimed His pleasure with the temple, the same as he was pleased with the tabernacle made by Moses; For by a cloud He proclaimed His

divine presence whenever Moses entered into the tabernacle (Exodus 40: 34).

- + I wish he who died together with Christ and was risen together with Him, would sing His praise; I wish he would pray toward the east; for it is written in the second book of the chronicles, that in the celebration of the dedication of the temple of the Lord, the priests, the Levites, and the singers stood toward the east, to give thanks to the Lord and to praise Him with the cymbals and the harps.

(The laws of the apostles)

“so that the priest could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God” (14)

“The priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God” (14). That is an evidence that the Levite priesthood will eventually cease to minister, once the Messiah, in whose body the fullness of Godhead will dwell, comes to His temple, *“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when he appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire” (Malachi 3: 1, 2).*

God proclaimed His appreciation of the weakness of the priests who could not endure the splendor of His glory, and could not continue ministering; the same thing that will later happen to the disciples on Mount Tabor, when they enter into the cloud (Luke 9: 34).

Describing what happened in the temple that day, the historian Josephus says: [Once the priests put everything in its proper place around the ark of the covenant, and got out, a dense cloud dwelt and spread in a gentle way in the

temple, not like a stormy cloud as it happens in severe winter. The cloud, however was so dense that darkness fell, and the priest could not distinguish one another, yet it granted all a seen glorious portrait of God, descending on that temple, and His joyful dwelling in His tabernacle.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 5

FIND YOUR REST, O LORD, IN MY HEART

- + In Your humility, You granted Your people the ark of Your covenant;
A sign of Your dwelling among them;
In the wilderness, it so passed that whenever the ark moved, they moved;
And whenever it stopped, they stopped;
And once Solomon built Your holy temple, the ark was put in the Most Holy Place;
There, the poles were retracted from the ark;
For it settled down at last in the Most Holy Place;
It settled down where Your people did in the promised land.

- + Proclaim Your presence inside me;
The way Your ark settled down in the Most Holy Place;
And the way You used to find comfort in the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus;
Find Comfort, O Lord, in my heart, and let me find comfort in You.

- + You proclaimed Your pleasure in the house built by Solomon;
For which the king, the leaders, the people, and even some foreigners, partook of its building;
By the dwelling of the cloud of Your glory in it;

That the priests could not recognize one another;
For their hearts and minds were overwhelmed by Your exalted secrets

+ Let my tongue, together with my heart praise You;
Let my depths exult by You;
And let them offer a new praise to You.



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CHAPTER 6

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD AND BLESSING THE CONGREGATION

Although this chapter conforms to (1 Kings 8), yet each of the two chapters has its own goal:

In (1 Kings 8), it was said that the celebration extended for as long as fourteen days. For it was bound to the feast of the tabernacles; and was called "*The dedication of the house*"; and that on the eighth day, the great day of the Feast, "*the king sent the people away*" (1 Kings 8: 65-66); But in 2 chronicles, it is said that on the eighth day, "*they held a sacred assembly*" (2 chronicles 7: 9).

The eighth day refers to the eternal life, being the first day of the new week; It is as though that feast concerns all those who have a portion in the gladness of the resurrection.

As the glory of the Lord dwelt in His holy house, and proclaimed God's presence among His people, king Solomon used the chance to seek the blessing of the Lord for His people; He raised a prayer to the Lord to be glorified in His people through His holy temple (See 1 Kings 8).

You can refer to our commentary on the book of kings 8, concerning the sayings of the fathers about the dedication of the temple.

1- Encountering Him who dwells in the dark cloud

2- The king blesses all the congregation of Israel

3 - 11

3- A prayer before the altar of the Lord

12 - 42

a- Seeking from the Lord to fulfill His promises

12 - 20

b- God, the merciful Judge of the people

21 - 23

c- God, the Leader of the army and the Liberator of the people

24 - 25

d- God accepts the repentance

26 - 31

e- God shows compassion on all the peoples

32 - 33

f- God is the advocate of His believers

34 - 39

g- The power of prayer in His house

40 - 41

h- *“Remember the mercies of Your servant David”*

42

1- AN ENCOUNTER WITH HIM WHO DWELLS IN THE DARK CLOUD:

“Then Solomon said, ‘He would dwell in the dark cloud’ (1)

The temple was built, all its holy furnishings were put in place; and all the people were well prepared with their whole heart to encounter God. The King stood on the platform; the priests by the altar; the Levites were ready for work; and the people gathered together with one spirit. Behold, all of them came to enjoy an awesome and joyful moment; when God proclaimed His divine presence and

His glory; and *“the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud”* (5: 13). Feeling his attachment to the Lord, Solomon was only preoccupied with blessing the people of Israel.

The closest Solomon’s attachment to the Lord, the more he loved his people, and longed for them to have a flood of divine blessings. Solomon was exultant and was proud that he built a house for the Lord, to dwell forever in it; he built it, not with the spirit of haughtiness, nor for the sake of his own glory, like ‘Ahasuerus’ who held a banquet to proclaim his riches and glory, and the greatness of his kingdom (Esther 1: 4), and behaved in an unbecoming way; but Solomon, on the other hand, did that great achievement for a magnificent goal, so that God may proclaim His perpetual dwelling among His people.

God, being light; why would He dwell in a dark cloud? ... In the heaven of heavens God dwells in the divine light, where no human eye can behold; but here on earth, He dwells in dense or dark cloud, to enable us to encounter Him, when He proclaims Himself in the depths of our souls.

Here, Solomon refers to the words of God to the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: *“I shall come to you in the darkness of the cloud, that the people will hear when I talk to you, and believe in you forever”* (See Exodus 19: 9; 19: 16’ Deuteronomy 4: 11; 5: 22). It was not possible for the people to enjoy the divine light; for the Lord said to Moses: *“No man shall see Me and live”* (Exodus 33: 20)

+ The Lord is in both the light and in the dark cloud. He is in the light for the beginners with whom He openly talks; But concerning the advanced, He talks to them mystically. He does not talk to the disciple the same way he does to the common people; for to the disciples He talks in a mystical way; and says: *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Luke 8: 8). That is the meaning of *“a dark cloud around Him”*, namely (secrets around Him). That is why in the book of Exodus, it is said that all the people were standing at

the foot of the mountain; while Moses alone ascended on Mount Sinai in a densely dark cloud; for the people were not able to recognize the secrets, while Moses alone could understand; hence the book says: "*He made darkness His secret place*" (Psalm 18: 11).

- + "*He made darkness His secret place*" (Psalm 18: 11). It is clear, therefore, that the thoughts about God, available before the human understanding, and according to personal worthiness, are not always clear and obvious; for God hides Himself as though in a dark cloud, from those who are unable to behold Him – partly because of the impurity of their minds, bound to their lowly human bodies (Philippians 3: 21); and partly because of their limited abilities to perceive God; which led the prophet to refer to the depth of the dogma about God, which is beyond the same spirit, "shut" (Isaiah 22: 22), and "sealed" the writings of the prophet isaiah (Isaiah 29: 11). If the Spirit did not open up the words of the prophets, the shut-in facts would never be revealed

(The scholar Origen)

“But I have built You an exalted house, and a place for You to dwell in forever” (2)

These six chapters concerning the building of the house of the Lord reveal the following concept of the temple in Solomon’s heart:

- 1- The **house of the Lord** (6: 10), a dwelling place for Him (6: 2). The word “house” was mentioned 37 times in the three chapters (5 to 7)

 - 2- The **house of blessing**: Solomon starts his talk by saying: *“Blessed be the Lord”* (6: 4), and at the same time he *“turned around and blessed the whole congregation of Israel”*(6: 3). In His house, it brings pleasure to God to pour His blessings in abundance on us.
- + Oh, Lord Jesus, I wish You lift away from us the pods and grant us Your blessings, for You are the One responsible in Your Father’s house. I wish You accept us as Your servants, even though we came late; for You accepted those of the eleventh hour, and gave them the same wages (Matthew 20: 9); You granted them the same life, but not the same glory; as the crown of righteousness is given only to him who can say: *“I have fought the good fight”* (2 Timothy 4: 7).

(St. Ambrose)

- 3- The **house of testimony**: Which embraces the ark of the testimony, namely of the covenant between God and His people (6: 19)

- 4- The **house of prayer**: (6: 12-44). The Lord Himself proclaimed on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah that He opens His house up before all peoples for prayer, saying: *“Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”* (Isaiah 56: 7). And when the Jews abused it, the Lord said to them: *“My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves”* (Matthew 21: 13; Luke 19: 46).

- 5- The **house of praise**: (7: 1-3).

2- THE KING BLESSES ALL THE CONGREGATION OF ISRAEL:

Solomon was most probably directing his face toward the Most High Place; But now as the cloud filled the whole house of the Lord, he turned his face toward the people; giving them his face, at the same time he prayed to God, to be glorified by blessing His people.

“Then the king turned around and blessed the whole congregation of Israel, while all the congregation of Israel stood” (3)

It is the priest who usually bless the people (Numbers 6: 22-27); but in certain circumstances like this, the king could bless, as David as well (2 Samuel 6: 18, 20). Solomon blessed the assembly, and through them he blessed the whole nation. Here we see Solomon on his platform, set according to the image of the altar in the wilderness, to pray for the sake of the whole people, and as their

representative, intercessor, and advocate, he prayed to God for their sake, more than a king who give commands to be obeyed. He knelt on his knees on the platform, and spread his hands toward heaven, and prayed for the sake of his people. In that he was a symbol of the divine Intercessor, about whom it is written: *“If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”* (1 John 2: 1-2).

It is befitting of every true believer, even a small child, to pray for the sake of all mankind, and to seek for them the heavenly blessings. In this, Solomon bore the Spirit of his Lord, *“who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2: 4)

“And he said, ‘Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, who has fulfilled with His hands what He spoke with His mouth to my father David, saying ...’ (4)

According to some, the best translation of the expression: *“Blessed be the Lord”*, is (He is worthy of thanksgiving); Solomon gave thanks to the Lord for choosing Jerusalem as the city of God, for choosing his father David a king; and for choosing him (Solomon) to build the house of the Lord.

Here, Solomon confesses that this great task bestowed on him was a divine gift, and not for the sake of his own worthiness, saying: *“Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David”*. It was a gift from the God of Israel to his father. With humility he confirms that the foremost favor is to God the Grantor of that gift, and not to his father David; And that his father has prepared everything for the task, as though he was the one who planted, and he (Solomon) watered what his father planted.

The believer should hold fast to God's promises which will never fail, for He is faithful (1 John 1: 9). He was with Abraham throughout his life, and promised to be with Isaac (Genesis 26: 3; 24), and with Jacob (Genesis 28: 15; 31: 3; 46: 1-4).

He renewed the promise with Moses (Exodus 3L 12; 33: 14), and then with Joshua (Joshua 1 5-9; 3: 7; 6: 27).

He also promised Gideon (Judges 6: 15-16); And Samuel confirmed it to the nation (1 Samuel 12: 22). David encouraged his son Solomon by that promise when he delivered to him the responsibility of building the temple (1 chronicles 28: 20).

It is good for the believer to remember the favor of those who preceded and those who follow him, to say together with the apostle Paul: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase* (1 Corinthians 3: 6)

"He spoke with His mouth to my father David". In his talk to his people, as well as in his prayer to God, Solomon refers to past history; the past for him is a live foundation upon which he builds his faith in God and relationship with Him. As far as we are concerned, it is befitting of us as believers, to count God's choice of Abraham as a father to a multitude of nations; Moses as the receiver of the law; David as a king over His people; and Solomon as the builder of His house; as being done to our account and for our sake. He chose us as well to be His children, to have pleasure in our entrance into a covenant with Him, or to renew the covenant with Him, and to recognize the particular mission He set for each of us.

"Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man to be a ruler over My people Israel" (5)

“But I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel” (6)

Solomon had no favor in what he did, as the task was according to God's choice, to His divine plan, and to His help to his father David and to him. It brought pleasure to God to choose Jerusalem as His city, and David as a king over His people.

“Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a temple for the name of the Lord God of Israel” (7)

But the Lord said to my father David, ‘Whereas it was in your heart to build a temple for My name, you did well in that it was in your heart’ (8)

David's heart desire was to build a house for the Lord, came conforming to God's will, but it was Solomon who will consummate it.

“Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who will come forth from your own loins, he shall build the temple for My name” (9)

“So the Lord has fulfilled His word which He spoke, and I have filled the position of my father David, and sat on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised; and I have built the temple for the name of the Lord God of Israel” (10)

“And there, I have put the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord which He made with the children of Israel” (11)

3- A PRAYER BEFORE THE ALTAR OF THE LORD:

That prayer concentrated on God's promise to David concerning His temple (7. 9. 10)

That temple or house is connected to three covenants:

- a- The first covenant with Abraham, referred to, by choosing Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered his son a burnt offering, to become the location of the temple (Genesis 17: 1)
- a- The second covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai during the exodus, as testified by the ark of the covenant.
- b- The third covenant with the prophet David (10), as testified by Solomon being assigned to build the temple. The book often connected between the ark of the covenant and David's throne. Even in the Babylonian captivity, when the temple was destroyed, and the ark of the covenant suffered, the throne of David was destroyed as well, and David's household suffered much

A- Seeking from God to fulfill His promises:

Solomon made a bronze platform, set it in the midst of the court, with the same dimensions as the bronze altar in (Exodus 27: 1). On it he stood, then knelt down on his knees, before all the congregation of Israel, and spread out his hands and prayed (13 etc.). It is as though that platform was bound to the altar of the wilderness, namely the altar of the tabernacle; where Solomon is glorified as a symbol of the Lord Christ.

While the altar of atonement in the wilderness refers to the cross, on which Christ bears the sins of the world, and atones for them; the platform here, refers to the other aspect of the cross, where the Crucified reigns in the heart, and proclaims His kingdom in it. It could be said, as well, that, while the altar of the wilderness refers to the cross, working in mankind, bearing their iniquities, to raise them up to the eternal glories; the platform refers to the work of the Crucified, risen from the dead, as there, in heaven, there is no need for forgiveness, for, in heaven no one commits a sin or iniquity against God. By that, the altar, through which we

get the forgiveness from God, will become a throne for God, on which He reigns by righteousness on our hearts.

“Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread out his hands” (12)

By kneeling before the altar and spreading out his hands (12-21), Solomon seeks from God to fulfill His promises to his father David; and to open His eyes upon that house day and night.

“He spread out his hands”: The Holy Book often spoke about spreading out the hands; but we do not find in it a single prayer about bringing them together. Spreading out the hands bears many meanings:

1- A call for an encounter with others: Admonishing His people who gave Him the back and not the face (Jeremiah 32: 33), God says to them: *“I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people”*

(Isaiah 65: 2; Romans 10: 21).

2- A feeling that man, empty-handed, anticipates the gifts and blessings of God. That was the feelings of Ezra the priest, who said: *“At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and*

my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God: (Ezra 9: 5). It is also said:

“If you would prepare your heart and stretch out your hands before Him”

(Job 11: 13)

“I spread out my hands to You; my soul longs for You like a thirsty land”

(Psalm 143: 6)

“My eyes waste away because of affliction. Lord, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands toward You” (Psalm 88: 9).

3- Spreading His hands, the Lord proclaims His compassion and mercy on His people: *“As an eagle stirs up his nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings”*

(Deuteronomy 32: 11)

4- To liken the heavenly creatures, particularly the cherubim, who spread their wings (1 Kings 6: 27; 8: 7).

5- Spreading out the hands is an expression used when someone intends to chastise or to do harm to another (see Lamentations 1: 10)

6- Spreading out the hands bears as well, a symbol of the Crucified who spread His hands to grant humanity the power of salvation, to embrace believers from all nations, to bear them to the bosom of

the Father; and to grant them conquest over the devil and all his power; as when Moses, spreading his hands, brought forth conquest over Amalek: *“So it was , when Moses held up his hands, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed”* (Exodus 17: 11). Israel and Amalek stood in awe to see Moses ascend the mountain and spread out his hands; watching an amazing and unique battle: Moses as the symbol of the Crucified, in whom the believers smelled the fragrance of life, Amalek, on the other hand smelled the smell of death. According to the apostle Paul: *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1: 18). Moses let the two sides fight each other, he did not give a command to his people to charge, but silently spread his hands

Portraying the activity of Moses spreading his hands in the battle against Amaleki, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi says:

+ You who dares to blame! ... Wait for the ultimate result, then start to admonish (Moses)

Before blaming him for leaving the battlefield and ascending the mountain, watch how he spread his hands and bought the conquest forth.

Watch how he humbly took along with him Aaron and Hur (Numbers 12: 3), to portray the three crosses on the Golgotha (Mark 15: 27).

Watch how he placed the cross of might on his chest, and spread his hands, to portray what the Son of God is going to do in an obvious manner.

Watch how, when he placed the banner of the cross on the hill, the shadow of the cross reflected upon the rows of the enemy and confused them.

Watch how the swift horses trampled, the mighty men fell, the horsemen collapsed, and the foot soldiers defeated.

Watch how the swords, the arrows, and the spears were broken; how the shields and the bows were cast down.

Watch how the archers could not aim their arrows; and how the horsemen could not escape on their swift horses.

Watch how the shields and armors could not cover the bodies against the strikes; and how the helmets could not protect their heads

Watch how the chariots, together with their charioteers, were amazingly captivated; and how the mighty horses, together with their rider, were paralyzed.

Watch how the archers cast away their arrows without aiming them; and how the swift horses fled away in confusion.

Watch how the wicked Amalek could not fight; for the cross was against him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

In my talk about the features of the Coptic icons, under the title: [Icons of men of prayer], I referred to the Coptic artist's care to portray some saints spreading their hands for prayer; and gave five examples for it, saying:

[According to 'Wasel'. [Portraying the saints, the Coptic artist uses this tendency for praying; by drawing them spreading their hands in prayer to God (Orant); as though to proclaim that praying is the secret of their holiness. This tendency is taking after the position of the Lord Christ on the cross, which represents one of

the most important movement by the priest during ministering the rite of the holy liturgy; and the position the martyrs and the saints prefer to take in the movements of their departure to paradise. The early church used it in prayer; as according to the scholar Tertullian: they looked upward with hands spread and heads uncovered].

“(for Solomon has made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court, and he stood on it, knelt down on his knees, before all the congregation of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven” (13)

After the building of the house of the Lord was finished, Solomon did not invite the kings, the leaders, and the elite of the surrounding nations, to boast the greatness of the buildings, the huge cost and the great effort of building them, but he invited the common people, together with the priests, and the elders of the people. To bow down, to kneel on his knees, to spread out his hands, and to reveal what was in his heart, all that was still not befitting of the greatness of the Mighty God, whom the heavens and earth could not contain. His celebration was not to parade what he has already, and what is going to achieve in the coming years, but to encounter the people with the spirit of humility, to enjoy the divine presence, and to renew the covenant with God, who, in His humility made it with our father Abraham, with His prophet Moses, and with David the sweet psalmist of Israel.

He stood on the platform, knelt down on his knees, and spread out his hands, to bear a symbol of the crucified Lord Jesus Christ who spread His hands with love, to fulfill the reconciliation between the Father and humanity, and to carry believers from all peoples to the heavenly life.

“and said, ‘Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven or on earth like You, who keep His covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts” (14)

All creatures have their equals and brethren among other creatures; but the Creator has no equal, He is absolutely above and beyond all creation. He is faithful, and all those who walk before Him with their whole hearts will find Him keeping His promises with them, and will show them mercy.

“You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father; You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day” (15)

“Therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep what You promised Your servant David my father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man sit before me on the throne of Israel, only

if your sons take heed to their way, to walk in My law as you have walked before Me” (16)

“Now then, O Lord God of Israel, let Your word come true which You have spoken to Your servant David” (17)

“But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this temple I have built for You?” (18)

Overwhelmed with emotions, Solomon saw that all what he has done are counted as not befitting of the greatness of God. How can the Almighty God dwell in a house built by human hands? He referred to this fact in his message to Hiram king of Tyre (2: 6), and here he refers to it in his prayer to God.

The Lord says: *“Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me, and where is the place of My rest?!” (Isaiah 66: 1).* And Steven, the first martyr, in his speech to his Jews persecutors, referred to

this saying on the tongue of Solomon and that of the prophet Isaiah (Acts 7: 47-50).; and the apostle Paul confirmed it in his preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 17: 24). Solomon, Isaiah, Steven, and Paul have all realized that God's desire to dwell among His people, is out of His love, grace, and humility.

“Yet regard the prayer of Your servant, and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant is praying before You” (19)

“That Your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where You said You would put Your name, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant prays toward this place” (20)

When Jonah looked toward the temple and prayed, God forgave him (Jonah 2: 4); so with Daniel in the land of captivity, when he looked toward Jerusalem and the temple and prayed for the people's sake ((Daniel 6: 10).

B- God the merciful Judge of His people::

“And may You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear from Your dwelling place in heaven, and when You hear, forgive” (21)

+ God is Omnipresent, but He loves those who seek Him, and come to His house, particularly those who endure great troubles to do so. In His house He is ready to listen to the prayers of the needy:

‘Hannah’ had the promise to give birth to the prophet Samuel, while standing praying in the temple.

'Anna', a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel., a widow of about 84 years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers, night and day, stood in the temple praising the Lord, and prophesied the birth of Christ (Luke 2: 36-37)..

And Simon the elder, just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him; came by the Spirit to the temple; and there he saw the infant Jesus with His mother, , took Him up in His arms, and had His blessing before he died (Luke 2: 25-32). In the church, the sacrifice of reconciliation is offered, where the people come together, and where the Lord comes according to His promise to dwell among them.

In case you did something that provoked God's anger, come to the church and reconcile with Him; for there, the spirits of His saints will intercede for you; so will probably do one of the living believers.. When you stand

in the church, you should not forget that there is someone who is probably praying for your sake, without your knowledge; and if you feel that your prayer is weak, be encouraged, and have one of the saints as your intercessor. It often happens that we come to the church with cool hearts, and while praying, all of a sudden we feel the warmth of worship and the strength of prayer, either by the help of saints, the prayers of the priest, or of one of the humble believers. It often happens that, while slothfully standing there, our eyes may come on one of those praying, pouring his soul and heart in prayer before the Lord, and our own hearts will ignite with a holy zeal, and the warmth of prayer will flow in us.

(Bishop St. Potin)

. *"If anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this temple" (22)*

The Sage looks at the house of the Lord as an awesome Court of justice, where the cases between people are tried; And therefore, in case someone swears a vow before the altar, he is committed to be true. Solomon started his reign by his famous verdict in the case of the two harlots (3: 6); but, as it is impossible for him, as well as for the courts of the State to see all the cases of the people, big and small, nor to reach the right verdict in them; Solomon seeks from God who searches the hearts and minds , and who knows the hidden things, to intervene for the sake of realizing the justice, to lift up the oppression from his State and land.

“then hear from heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, bringing retribution on the wicked by bringing his way on his own head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness” (23)

Solomon seeks from the Holy and Righteous God, to watch what dwells upon the righteous of oppression, and to justify them.

C- God, the Leader of the army, and the Liberator of His people:

Looking at the history of His people since their exodus from Egypt up to the last days of his father David, Solomon saw behind every conquest, the mighty hand of God; and behind every defeat, a falling into sin, and a perversion from the divine truth; he saw that the goal of the defeat is the return of the people to the truth, and the edification of their life.

That divine work does not annul the role of the ruler or the king, beside his care for the military things, to set wise leaders and those of experience; for God does not work with the lazy and the slothful.

On another aspect, God grants the conquest, and sometimes allows for defeat, to provoke us to perceive the hidden battle between man and the devil.

“Or if Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy, because they have sinned against You, and return and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this temple” (24)

Solomon expected that there will be difficult days through which his people will go, on account of that they will fall into sins, and will be in need of divine chastisement, to return to God, to seek Him, and to supplicate to Him in the time of affliction (24, 26, 28).

“Then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to them and their fathers” (25)

- + While entreating the Savior of our souls, to destroy our iron chains, to liberate us from our tough imprisonment, and to make our spirits lighter than any wing; Let us contribute on our side by having an exultant enflamed zeal; for by that we would in a short time be liberated from the evil that presses on us, to perceive our past condition, and to hold fast to the freedom given to us as a gift from God, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His love for men; Glory and dominion be to Him forever, Amen.

(St. John Chrysostom)

D- God accepts repentance:

With a practical evangelical thought, St. John Chrysostom wishes for man not to concentrate on his sins, but rather on the Grantor of the Kingdom and forgiveness. For concentrating on heaven will lift up his inner being, as though by the wings of the Holy Spirit, to recognize the glory prepared for him; to perceive the truth of his weakness, to recognize the grace of God, capable to turn the heart from corruption to non-corruption; and even to set out of the heart of dust, a new heaven; and out of men what are like angels.

“When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place, and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them” (26)

“Then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance” (27)

“Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you – the former rain and the latter rain in the first month” (Joel 2: 23)

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and the latter rain” (James 5: 7)

That is the rain promised by the Lord Christ to send to His disciples, from the Father, as a sign of His love and care for them. And as it is written:

: “In the light of the king’s face is life; and his favor is like a cloud of the latter rain” (Proverb 16: 15).

“His going forth is established as the morning. He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth” (Hosea 6: 3)

“Ask the Lord for rain. In the same time of the latter rain, the Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain; grass in the field for everyone”
(*Zechariah 10: 1*)

“Let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest” (Jeremiah 5: 24)

- + The Mighty God gives rain on earth, when He waters the dry hearts of the Gentiles by the grace of the heavenly preaching, and sends water on all things; for, by the fullness of the Spirit, He turns the barrenness of man to fruition; as said by the lips of the Lord Himself: *“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst”* (John 4: 14)

(Pope Gregory the Great)

- + It is the same rain that come on the whole world; but it appears different on things of different color: It appears white on the white lilies; red on the roses; violet on the violet; etc. It is something on the palm tree, and something else on the grapevine; It is everything on all things. It conforms itself according to what receives it, and becomes convenient for every plant.
So is the Holy Spirit; although of one nature, and indivisible, Yet He grants His grace to everyone according to His will.
When a tree is watered it produces blossoms; so will the soul while in sin, getting qualified by repentance for the grace of the Holy Spirit, it flowers in righteousness.
Through the same Spirit in His nature; but by the will of God, and in the name of the Son, He produce virtuous fruition in different persons: He will

use the tongue of someone for wisdom; will enlighten another with prophecy; will give another the power of driving the unclean spirits out; and will grant another the gift of interpreting the Holy Books. He will give self-control to someone; and will teach another to give, another to fast, or to be humble; and another to despise the things pertaining to the body; and will prepare another for martyrdom. He works differently in different persons; though He Himself is One with no difference.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + I wish our soul bless the Lord, so that the Lord will bless us. For when the Lord blesses us, we grow; and when we bless the Lord, we grow as well; In both cases we are the ones who get the benefit (and not the Lord). First, let us have the blessing of the Lord; for then we can bless Him. His blessing on us is the rain, and, at the same time, it is the fruition (namely we bless Him by the blessing He gave us). The rain will come back to God the Owner of the earth , who rained on us.
Let us sing these words by a fruitful worship, by a true heart, and by no vain words, for it is obvious that God was called “*A Vinedresser*” (John 15: 1); And as the apostle says: “*You are God’s field; You are God’s building*” (1 Corinthians 3: 9). God the Father is a Vinedresser, who plants His vine, and anticipates its fruition. The Lord Christ Himself says that He planted a vine and delivered it to vinedressers who were supposed to give the fruition in due time.

- + The lowlands will be filled, and the highland will dry up.
The grace is rain; So why do you marvel if “*God resist the proud, but gives grace to the humble?*” (James 4: 6);
“*Do not be haughty but fear*” (Romans 11: 20). Fear until you get filled; Do not be haughty lest you dry up.

(St. Augustine)

- + As the barren land cannot produce fruition unless it receives water; So are we, who were dry wood before, we would never have been able to bear the fruition of life without a flow of rain from above. Our bodies receive union with non-corruption through the cleansing of baptism; but our souls will, through the Spirit. This and that are important for the sake of this cause; for they both contribute to the divine life.

(St. Erinaos)

“When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is” (28)

We often suffer afflictions, to the extent that we count ourselves as have lost everything. But by repentance, we return to the Lord, and rise up as though to heaven itself.

- + That is the work of the divine Physician; not in a court of justice, nor in a position to punish on sin, but He grants the forgiveness of sin.

- + After suffering in a foreign land what the wicked deserve, of hunger and thirst, perceiving the perdition he brought upon himself through putting himself, by his own choice in foreign hands far from his father, how he became in exile, instead of his own home, in need instead of in riches, in famine instead of in abundance, The prodigal son said: *“I perish with*

hunger” (Luke 15: 17).. It is as though he says [I, who am not a stranger, but a son of a good father, and a brother of a good brother; free and noble, have become lower than the hired hands; I have fallen from the exalted high rank down to the lowest of grades.

- + You have lost paradise (the garden of Eden), but God granted you heaven, to confirm His compassion, that He will conquer the devil; even if he makes thousands of plans against mankind, they will not benefit him; for God always leads us to a greater honor.

You have fallen under judgment for sometime; but you were honored by eternal life.

While God commands the earth to produce for you thorns and thistles, He lets the soil of the spirit give you fruition. So you see that the gain is greater than the loss.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“whatever prayer or whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows his own burden and his own grief, and spreads out his hands to this house” (29)

“then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all men)” (30)

God alone knows the hearts of men; all their thoughts, goals, and intentions, are exposed before Him. However they may be hidden from men, angels, and demons, they could never be hidden from God; who knows, not just what is in the heart, but knows the heart itself and even its pulses.

- + It was written: *“And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This man blasphemes’. But Jesus knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’”* (Matthew 9: 2, 3). But this only concerns God, namely knowing the hidden secrets of men. Hear what the prophets say: *“You alone know the hearts of men”* (30); and *’ “God searches the heart and mind”* (Psalm 7: 9).;and, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?”* (Jeremiah 17: 9).. ... Several texts tell us that knowing the heart and the mind is something that concern God alone.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“that they may fear you, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You gave our fathers” (31)

D- God, the Compassionate on all peoples:

“Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but who comes from a far country for the sake of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, when they come and pray in this temple”
(32)

“then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You; that all the people of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name” (33)

Solomon expected that some belonging to foreign nations will come to the temple of the Lord from far land, and submit to the living God, once they discover the vanity of their idols, and perceive that God is the Lord of the whole earth.

- + God is so compassionate that He will never turn His face away from a true repentant. Even when man goes to the extreme of evil, once he returns to the way of virtue, God will receive him, welcome him, and does everything to bring him back to his former condition. God shows the highest of mercy, even if man does not show complete repentance; He does not disregard the smallest of things, but gives the greatest of rewards; which is shown by the prophet Isaiah who says: *“For the iniquity of his covetousness, I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry; and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways and will heal him, I will also lead him, and restore comfort to him, and to his mourners”* (Isaiah 57: 17-18).

(St. John Chrysostom)

F- God, the Advocate of His believers:

“When Your people go out to battle against their enemies, wherever You send them, and when they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name” (34)

“then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause” (35)

“When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to a land far or near” (36)

“Yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying: ‘We have

sinned; we have done wrong, and have acted wickedly” (37)

“and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been carried captive, and pray toward their land which

You gave to their fathers, toward the city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name” (38)

“Then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You” (39)

G- The power of praying in His house:

“Now, my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open, and let Your ears be attentive to the prayer made in this place” (40)

Solomon desire was that God’s eyes be open, and His ears attentive to the prayers made in this place.... But now, as the Lord dwell among us, came to be as one of us, very close to us, we have the right to enter into the bosom of the Father; and then, everything we seek in the name of Christ will be given.

In the book entitled “The Life of Prayer” it came that a certain monk was slothful to attend the collective prayers despite his presence among the congregation. One night, while standing for prayer, he saw a pillar of light going up to heaven from where the brethren gather to pray. And beside this pillar of light, he saw a tiny spot of faint light which sometimes shine, and sometimes is so pale to be almost invisible. While he was marveling at what he saw, behold, he heard the voice of God saying to him: [Why would you marvel? The pillar of light come up

from the brethren who gather together in a pure prayer; While this tiny spot of light is the prayer of him who, despite his presence among the congregation he is slothful to join them. Now, in case you intend to continue living in the congregation, you have to abide to its laws and statutes; And once you are strong enough to live alone far from it and pray on your own, you may do that].

“Now, therefore, arise, O Lord God, You and the ark of Your strength. Let Your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation; and let Your saints rejoice in goodness” (41)

Here, Solomon ends his prayer by words he quoted from his good father David in (Psalm 132: 8-10). Which was not included in the book of kings

“Clothed with salvation”. They not only enjoy salvation, but will become a tool for the salvation of others, through offering the sacrifices of righteousness.

“And Your saints rejoice in goodness”, The service of the temple will become the source of joy and gladness to the whole people, to *“be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple”* (Psalm 65: 4)

H- “Remember Your mercies on Your servant David”

“O Lord God, do not turn away the face of Your anointed; Remember Your mercies on Your servant David” (42)

In the book of the king, the end of Solomon’s prayer came to refer to Moses and the exodus from the bondage of Pharaoh; But here, it refers to God’s mercies on His servant David. While the book of the kings was preoccupied with the liberation from the bondage of Pharaoh and his armies (the devil and the hosts of darkness); the present book is preoccupied with the setting of the kingdom of the

Son of David, the Lord of lords, and the King of kings in the church of the new covenant.

Solomon ends his prayer by two requests:

- 1- If it is God who anointed him a king over His people; he would never be able to fulfill his mission if God turns His face away from him. His practice of the royal shepherding has its source in the King of kings, the greatest Shepherd, without whom he would certainly fail to fulfill his mission
- 2- Remembering God's mercies on His servant David, Solomon trusts in God's promises to his father David, that bear mercy, help, and comfort; which God desires to grant to all men.

+ We should perpetually preach the mercy of God. We should always tell you about the limitless sea of His exalted love; for we live and exist by His mercy.

(St. John Chrysostom)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 6

**I BOW DOWN BEFORE YOU, O LORD, AND SPREAD MY HANDS OUT
TOWARD YOU**

+ Having in his heart to build a house for the Lord;
Solomon dedicated all his energies, and the nation's energies for this glorious work;

And once the work came to an end, his soul was crushed inside him, by thinking:

What building is befitting for Him, whom heaven and earth cannot contain?!

+ He did not boast what he achieved before kings and leaders;
but, together with the common people, he set forth to Your house;
He bowed down and spread his hands out toward You;
He sought Your dwelling among Your people;
The house was filled with a dark cloud;
And Your fear dwelt upon all, together with unutterable glorious joy.

+ He opened his mouth blessing you for the sake of Your love and
condescension;
I wonder, when he spread his hands, that he became a symbol for You?
You who ascended to Mount Golgotha;
Where You spread Your pure hands;
Crushing the dragon under the feet of Your children;
And You opened the gates of heaven,
To make the heavenlies exult in the salvation of mankind.

+ Solomon became a partner with Moses, the great among the prophets, the
receiver of the Law;

He who ascended the mount, spread out his hands, to let You lead the
battle Yourself;

Whenever he spread his hands, his people prevailed over Amalek;
Grant me to bow down on my knees, spread my hands out toward You,
and cry out, saying;

*"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives
in me"* (Galatians 2: 20);

Let me hide in You, O the Crucified Savior of the world;
Let my heart ignite with faith, hope, and love;

I see heaven open, listening to the sighs of my heart; I seek for the sake of every one who went astray from the true way;

I beseech You, O heavenly Physician, to heal every sick

My heart moans together with every naked, hungry, and needy.

+ By Your cross, You open up the gates of Your mercies, and pour Your blessings on us

By Your cross, You cover us against the reproach of sin, and scatter any darkness in us;

By Your cross, we challenge the devil, sin, covetousness, and seductions of the world;:

By Your cross, You crush the head of the devil underneath our feet;

By Your cross, we practice our sonhood to Your Father, and become Your ambassadors;

By Your cross, You conform in us, and we come to be a living icon of You;

By Your cross, You gather us together, to be the one holy bride;

By Your cross, Your commandments turn into adornments for our hearts

By Your cross, You turn our hearts of dust into a new heaven;

By Your cross, You raise our hearts up to heaven, so as not to be defiled by the uncleanness of the world

By Your cross, no hate will crawl into our hearts, even against our enemies;

By Your cross, we desire that Your salvation be proclaimed even to the opponents of the truth;

By Your cross, Your Holy Spirit unceasingly renews our depths;

By Your cross, You grant us grace upon grace, and glory above glory;

By Your cross, You reveal to us Your divine life-giving secrets;

By Your cross, You bring us forth to Your heavens;

By Your cross, we enjoy the inner joy and peace;

By Your cross, we anticipate Your coming on the clouds, to set forth to You;

By Your cross, we join the heavenly choirs;
By Your cross, we come to be like the cherubim, fly up to heaven, and
settle down in Your bosom;
Glory be to You, O Crucified, Grantor of the resurrection and glory



CHAPTER 7

GOD RESPONDS TO SOLOMON'S PRAYER

Because Solomon offered a prayer with the spirit of humility and thanksgiving to God who granted him that task as a divine gift; and at the same time, he sought nothing for himself, but mercy for the people; and did not forget the role played by his father in the work; God responded to his prayer, for it conforms with the holy will of God.

1- A public divine response to Solomon's prayer	1
2- The priests were unable to enter the house of God	2 - 3
3- Animal sacrifices, and sacrifices of praise	4 - 6
4- Joyful celebrations	7 - 11
5- The Lord appears to Solomon	17 - 18
6- The Lord warns Solomon against perversion from His commandment	19 - 22

1- A PUBLIC DIVINE RESPONSE TO SOLOMON'S PRAYER:

“Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple” (1)

There is no mention in the book of the kings of the response of God to Solomon's prayer, nor His receiving the dedication of the temple (6). Which is a magnificent portrait of the experience of the believer of the deposit of heaven, while still in this world, in this body.

Before Solomon even move after his prayer, God instantly proclaimed His response to this prayer by a fire that came down from heaven.

That also happened when Elijah offered a sacrifice to God against the four hundred and fifty priests of the Baal who were crying out and cutting themselves from morning to noon (1 Kings 18: 36-39). And when fire came down from the Lord and burned the burnt offering and the fat, when Aaron was dedicated as a high priest (Leviticus 9: 24)

What is the significance of the falling of fire? And what is its activity in the life of those in attendance?

- 1- God proclaimed to Solomon, as well as to all those who were there of the leaders and people, in a public way, His response to Solomon's prayer, by His acceptance of the king, the house he built, the worship he offered, and the people attending the celebration. By sending fire, God showed His pleasure on Moses (Leviticus 9: 24), on Gideon (Judges 6: 21), on David (1 Chronicles 21: 26), and on Elijah (1 Kings 18: 38); and as it was said by the prophet Isaiah: "*Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?*" (Isaiah 33: 14)
- 2- According to some, the fire here, refers to the dwelling of God Himself or His glory; as it is written: "*For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God*" (Deuteronomy 4: 24); And when God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, fire came down (Exodus 24: 16-17); And the Holy Spirit came down as tongues of fire, once the church was sanctified by the sacrifice of the crucified Christ (Acts 2: 3).
- 3- That proclamation encouraged the priests and the people to proceed in their joyful celebrations for as long as 14 days, and encouraged Solomon to glorify God publicly.
- 4- Sending fire on the sacrifice refers to the fact that God did not send fire to consume the people because of their sins, but to consume their sacrifices as an atonement for them, to appease His anger. Here it is to be noticed that the fire has not come down when the sacrifices were slain, but not before the prayer was raised. Together with offering the sacrifice, we are committed to enter into a

- debate with God; who will not enter into the boat of our life against our will; for it is written: *“They willingly received Him into the boat”* (John 6: 21).
- 5- The descent of fire also refers to the descent of the fiery Spirit of God to enflame our hearts by the fire of His love, to burn the thorns of sin and the corruptive covetousness. While the Lord Christ talked to the two disciples of Emmaus, they said to one another *“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road?”* (Luke 24: 32).
 - 6- According to some fathers, the descent of fire refers to the decent of a heavenly creature, namely angels, about whom it is written: *“He makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire”* (Psalm 104: 4). And as referred by St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi to what happened when Elijah’s disciple Elisha saw chariots and horses of fire to take Elijah up.; and to the descent of fire on the sacrifice offered by Elijah.
- + Hoping that the grace of the Holy Spirit would not cool down in us, the blessed Paul warned us, saying: *“Do not quench the Spirit”* (Thessalonians 5: 19). We may remain partners with Christ, if we hold fast until the end to the Spirit who was given to us. Saying *“Do not quench the Spirit”* does not imply that the Spirit is put under the authority of man, or that He may suffer by him, but because the unthankful man intends to quench the Spirit, and would become like the wicked who contradict the Spirit by their unholy deeds. They are without understanding, deceptive, and sin lovers. They keep walking in the dark, for they do not have *“the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world”* (John 1: 9)..

This kind of fire took hold of the prophet Jeremiah, in whom the Word was like fire, and said that he cannot endure it (Jeremiah 20: 9). Then came our Lord Jesus Christ, the man-lover to send fire on the earth, saying: *“how I wish it were already kindled”* (Luke 12: 49); who, as testified by the prophet Ezekiel (18: 23, 32), desires the repentance of man more than his death; so as to uproot the evil completely from man; then the souls that are purified could bring forth fruition, the

seeds planted by the Lord, “*Some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*”
(Matthew 13: 8)

As an example, Cleopas and his companion (Luke 24: 32), who were at first weak because of their lack of knowledge; then their heart burned within them by the words of the Savior, and showed the fruition of their knowledge. And when the blessed Paul took hold of this fire (Romans 12: 11), he did not refer it to flesh and blood, but being experienced in the grace, he became a preacher of the Word (Christ)..

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

- + We confirm that this fire sent by the Lord Christ, is for the salvation and benefit of men; with which God fills our hearts. The fire here is the salvation message of the gospel, and the power of its commandments. For all of us here on earth, who are dead-cold because of sin and are in ignorance, will be kindled by the godly life, and, according to the blessed Paul, will come to be “*fervent in Spirit*” (Romans 12: 11), We shall also be fellows in the Holy Spirit, who is like fire within us.

According to a saintly prophet in God, about Christ the Savior of all: “*The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts; But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when he appear? For He is like a refiner’s fire, and a purifier of silver*” (Malachi 3: 1-3). By the temple here, he means the body that is holy in truth, with no defilement, who is born by the holy virgin, by the Holy Spirit and the power of the Father; As it is said to the blessed virgin: “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you*” (Luke 1: 35); He was counted as the Messenger of the covenant, who comes to reveal to us the good will of the

Father, and to serve us; as according to His words: *“All things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you”* (John 15: 15) ... And like those who use the fire to refine the silver and gold, so the Savior purifies the thought of all those who believe in Him by teachings with the power of the Holy Spirit.

We interpret the live coal that touched the lips of the prophet (Isaiah 6: 6-7) and purified him of every sin, as being the message of salvation and the confession of faith in Christ; which is confirmed by the apostle Paul, saying: *“If you confess with your mouth the lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10: 9).

We say, therefore, that the power of the divine message is like a live coal and fire, as the God of all says to the prophet Jeremiah: *“Behold, I will make My word in your mouth fire, and these people wood, and it shall devour them”* (Jeremiah5:: 14); and, *“Is not My word like fire, says the Lord?”* (Jeremiah 23: 29).

(St, Cyril the Great)

2- THE PRIESTS UNABLE TO ENTER THE HOUSE OF GOD:

And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house” (2)

The Lord said to the prophet Moses: *“You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live”* (Exodus 33: 20)

- + It is impossible for us to behold God by our human eyes; for the un-corporeal cannot fall under corporeal eyes; as testified by the only begotten Son of God the Father, Himself, saying: *“No one has ever seen God”*. If therefore anyone understand from what came in Ezekiel that he has seen God (Ezekiel 28: 1); he,

according to the Holy Book, has actually seen *“the likeness of the glory of God”* and not God Himself. .If therefore, seeing the likeness of the glory of God has filled the prophets with terror, if anyone attempts to see God, he will die; Because of that, by His mercy, God spread the heavens before His divinity to keep us from perdition. This is proved by the saying of the prophet: *“Oh, that You would rend the heavens.! That You would come down! That the mountains would shake at Your presence”* (Isaiah 64: 1).

Why would you marvel that Daniel was terrified and fell down on his face by seeing the likeness of the glory of God, when he just saw the archangel Gabriel, who is no more than a servant of God, who came in human form (See Daniel 10: 9; 16: 18). If therefore seeing Gabriel has terrified the prophet, Can man see God Himself, and not die?

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

*“When the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshipped and
praised the Lord, saying: ‘For He is good; For His mercies endure forever””(3)*

The reaction to that holy fire and the glory of God, was that the hearts of the priests were filled with the fear of God, and could not enter into the house of God, for the glory of God filled the house. The people bowed to the ground , worshipped, and gave God thanks (3). Yet, together with the holy fear of God, the hearts of all were filled with peace, and they stood fast before the Lord.. They honored the divine glory with submission, fear, and pleasure; together with feeling of unworthiness of the divine presence, and true longing to worship God with all submission, together with the holy hosts.

With the descent of the divine fire, their tongues set forth with praise, saying: “*For He is good; For His mercies endure forever*”, a praise perpetually offered by the heavenlies, and the godly men.

It is as though the priests, together with the people cried out, saying: [It is out of His mercy that God did not send fire to consume them, but to consume the sacrifice instead of them; to consume the thorns of our sins, and to ignite our feelings with the fire of the divine love.

The object of praise and thanksgiving is God Himself, being good; and His goodness is unique and absolute. He dwells among His people, Keeper of the covenant; the true leader, greater than all the human leaders, and all the heavenly hosts.

He is good as a Creator, who brought us forth from nothing, and created all our needs. He is good as a Savior; If any harm or corruption come over us because of our sins, He remains good to reform what we have corrupted.

He is good, sends leaders, and even wishes to set every man as a leader; and remains, Himself the hidden Leader who is capable of bringing us forth into His bosoms.

He is good as a Warrior; who supports the weak, the oppressed. and those who have no one to support them.

He is good as a Helper, who cares for everything small and big in the life of His creatures, even for a morsel of bread we need.

He is good as Heavenly who, though dwelling in heaven, yet He does not forsake the earthlies, but desires to turn them into what is almost like the heavenlies, prepares for them places in heaven,, to come and take them, and grant them the fellowship in His heavenly glories.

+ “*For His mercies endure forever*”. And according to the psalmist: “*For in death there is no remembrance of You*” (Psalm 6: 5); For in death no one can repent his sins..

As long as you are in this world, I beg you to repent. ... Confess, and give thanks to God, For here on earth, God is merciful; and can be compassionate on the repentant, but there, He is a Judge and not merciful. Here, He stretches His hands to the fallen, but there, He acts a Judge.

I say all this now to motivate those who assume that in Hades there could be a remorse on sin.

(St. Jerome)

- + *“Let the house of Israel say: ‘He is good and His mercies endure forever’”. Why does he refer to the house of Israel who suffered much from captivity? those who were enslaved in Egypt, were led to the end of the earth, and suffered much in Palestine? ... He means to say that they, in particular, are witnesses to His multitude of goodness, which they have enjoyed more than anyone else. Their sufferings are in themselves a sign of His great care; and, above anything else, they are committed to thanksgiving for having Christ come from among them. I mean, even if they have suffered a multitude of calamities, it was because of their own denial, and not because of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to them, and perpetually told them: “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15: 24); and said to His disciples: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, ... but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10: 5, 6); and to the Canaanite woman He said: “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs” (Matthew 15: 26).*

He actually did everything, and was preoccupied with the salvation of this people. And now, having showed that they are unworthy of His goodness, let them think about the increase of their denial.

(St. John Chrysostom)

3- ANIMAL SACRIFICES AND SACRIFICES OF PRAISE:

“Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord” (4)

This fire kindled the heart of the king and those of the people with love, to offer more sacrifices.... The more pleasure in us God proclaims, the more will be our longing to worship Him, and to minister to Him without failing.

- + Listen to the voice of the prophet, saying: *“I will freely sacrifice to You, O Lord”* (Psalm 54: 6). Learn how to offer endurance of labor by your own free will. He who discovers his slothfulness, accuses himself, and optionally endures affliction, will always feel remorse.

Let everyone of you meditate in the amazing freedom granted by the Lord Jesus Christ to His faithful people through the life-giving new birth, and through pouring the Holy Spirit. ... For then, he would perceive that God could never be ministered by slothfulness; and that even if we honor Him every day, we could never give Him His due.

We, therefore, above anything else, liberate our hearts from being attached to evil, to be able, in a better way, to feed on the fruition of justice.

“I will freely sacrifice to You, O Lord”.. The prophet did not use this expression without reason; for he perceived that many, have ministered to God only out of commitment, and their inner hearts were opponents to ministry; While promising something with their mouths, they planned something else in their hearts.

“I will freely sacrifice to You, O Lord” .Even though the gifts were little in themselves, they become great through offering them with pleasure; while those offered out of commitment, will most probably corrupt their giver; He who sets a banquet against his own will, will perpetually complain because its high cost.

I will freely sacrifice to You, O Lord”.. Offer every day joyfully to your Creator, offer him few, utter sweet words of praise by your tongue; Hasten, as well, to consummate, by the spirit of godliness, the ministry allotted to you. Listen to the words said by the prophet: “The optionally given offerings of my mouth are acceptable to You, O Lord”..

(Father Valerian)

“King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand bulls, and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God” (5)

“And the priests attended to their services, the Levites also with instruments of music of the Lord, which king David had made to praise the Lord, saying: ‘For His mercy endures forever, whenever David offered praise by their ministry. The priests sounded trumpets opposite them, while all Israel stood” (6)

Those animal sacrifices were mixed with sacrifices of joyful praise.

The two books of the chronicles, being books of worship to God, care for the role of praise in worship, in every occasion to glorify God. The Levites sang praise, the priests sounded trumpets, while all Israel stood; Together with praise, sacrifices were offered in the temple.

4- JOYFUL CELEBRATIONS:

“Furthermore Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was in front of the house of the Lord; for there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings

, because the bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat” (7)

“At that time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation from the entrance of Hammath to the Brook of Egypt” (8)

And on the eighth day they held a sacred assembly, for they observed the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days” (9)

*On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for the goodness that the Lord had done for David, for Solomon,
and for His people Israel” (10)*

With every gladness and zeal, the celebrations were extended in the following way:

- a- Solomon, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation (8), celebrated the Feast for seven days, from the second to the ninth day of the month..
- b- The tenth day was the great day of atonement (9)
- c- From the fifteenth day, the Feast of the tabernacles started until the twenty-second day.(9)
- d- On the twenty-third day of the month, Solomon sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart (10)

*“Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord and the king’s house; and Solomon successfully accomplished all that came into his heart to make in the house of the Lord
and in His own house” (11)*

This worship, filled with joy and gladness, supported Solomon to finish his mission to build the house of the Lord and the king’s house, and to accomplish all that came into his heart with all success.

The living and true worship goes hand in hand with the spirit of success in every aspect of life for the sake of the enjoyment of the divine presence

5- THE LORD APPEARS TO SOLOMON:

. *“Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: ‘I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice”* (12)

Being the divine Worker and the Controller, God chose His house which He called “*the house of sacrifice*”; He chose Jerusalem to be the city of God where His house to be built; and chose David to become a king on His people. God appeared to Solomon by night, to confirm His acceptance of, and His pleasure in his work, of His gladness for his faithfulness, loyalty, and zeal, and his spiritual way in building His house; And to proclaim to him His response to his prayer, previously written in the sixth chapter. (12)

“The house of sacrifice”. . St. Agnatius the Theophorus called the church “the place of sacrifice”; the “Golgotha” on which the Lord Christ was crucified, as a sin offering for the sake of the whole world.

God, Himself, calls the temple “the house of sacrifice”, which carries two meanings:

- a- The worship has to be bound to sacrifice; as without the shedding of blood, you cannot approach God, where forgiveness will be realized by the precious blood of Christ
- b- Jerusalem is the convenient location to offer the sacrifice. Hezekiah and Josiah have both exerted all effort to uproot all other places to offer a sacrifice to the Lord.

“When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to destroy the land, or send pestilence among My people” (13)

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (14)

Here God proclaims His complete acceptance of Solomon’s prayer, which is not mentioned in the book of the kings. God promised to accept the repentance of His people, and to return to them, saying: *“I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (14).*

+ When the regular people gather together in one accord, it will be so great, and would never be disregarded by God (2 Chronicles 7: 14; Matthew 18: 19)

(Father Ambrose)

“Now, My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place” (15)

“For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually” (16)

“As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, and do according to all that I have commanded you; and if you keep My statutes and My judgments” (17)

Perceiving his inability and that of all men to keep the commandment, Solomon, in his prayer says: *“May the Lord our God be with us as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us; that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers” (1 Kings 8: 57. 59).*..As to man’s side, he says: *“Let your heart therefore be loyal to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day” (1 Kings 8: 61).*

On His side, God appeared to Solomon, filled His house with glory, and poured joy and exultation in the hearts of all who were there. Yet, on the side of Solomon, the leaders, and the people, they are committed to obey the commandment, and to feel their responsibilities, to respond to God's mercy and grace. God gives us His grace to grant us the sweetness of the commandment, and the possibility of having fellowship with Him; and on our side, we are committed to strive by the Lord without slothfulness.

+ As I can see, the grace of the Holy Spirit is always ready to fill those who, from the beginning decide to hold fast in their war against the enemy (the devil), and never to surrender until they prevail over him.

Anyway, the Holy Spirit who called them, although He will make the way of repentance easy, sweet, and well paved; yet He comes back again to reveal to them the actual truth of the way (its difficulties and labor). Helping them in everything, He commits them to offer the necessary works of repentance; and reveals to them what the works of the body and soul are... until He brings them back to God their Creator in true repentance.

Through this goal, the Holy Spirit strengthens them to strive, body and soul, until both become alike in purity, as they are in the inheritance of the eternal life. As to the body, it strives in continuous fasting, and perpetual watching; while the soul strives in spiritual practices, together with persistence on all kinds of virtues, through the body. We therefore, have to care to do nothing with slothfulness, but to do everything by the body in the fear of God, to bring forth fruition.

(St. Anthony the Great)

+ Paul warns his listeners not to be slothful, on account of that God will search for them, and will even send them as ambassadors. On the contrary, we are committed to bring Him pleasure, and to reap our spiritual blessings.

- + Paul means to say: [The way your salvation is our job, it is yours as well. As we preach the word to you, we endure sorrows; and, receiving it, you endure them as well. ... We endure to provide you with what you receive; and you endure to receive what is given to you, so as not to lose anything. Your salvation is realized, not only by faith, but also by enduring the same sufferings we do. You are like a boxer in an arena, full of the great energy of (the work itself) which would increase the more you feel the need to endure everything with nobility. .

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Let us then run the race in this world, to earn the reward in the coming world.

(St. Jerome)

“then I shall establish the throne of your kingdom as I covenanted with David your father, saying: ‘You shall never fail to have a man as ruler in Israel’”
(18)

7- A WARNING AGAINST PERVERSION FROM THE COMMANDMENT:

“But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and commandments which I set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them” (19)

- + It is befitting of us to believe that a delay to keep the commandment, is actually a disobedience by him who intends to keep the commandment ... We have to remember the saying: *“Do not delay to turn back to the Lord; and do not postpone it from day to day”* (Sirach 5: 7); and, *“Do not say to your neighbor, ;Go and come back, and tomorrow I will give it;, when you have it with you”* (Proverb 3: 28)

(The scholar Origen)

“then I will uproot them from My land which I have given them, and this house I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations” (20)

“And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say: Why has the Lord done thus to this land and this house?” (21)

“then they will answer, ‘because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, and worshipped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this calamity on them’” (22)

If God had pleasure in building a house for Himself, to dwell in it forever among His people, He is preoccupied with the sanctity of his people. The temple would not protect them from destruction, if they disobey the divine commandment. According to the prophet Jeremiah: *“Do not trust in these lying words, saying: ‘the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these;’” (Jeremiah 7: 4).*

+ *“And it will be when you say, ‘Why does the Lord our God do all these things to us? Then you shall answer them, ‘Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours’” (Jeremiah 5: 19)*

We ought to understand the literal meaning; It is enough for now to activate the memory of those who intend to understand.

The children of Israel who possessed the holy land, the temple, and the house of prayer; ought to worship the living God; Yet, having disobeyed the law and the divine commandment, worshipped the idols, and received the idols from Damascus, and the idols of the Gentiles in their land, as is written in the book of the kings, they became worthy of being cast in the lands of the idols, where the idols are worshipped.

That is why the Lord says: *“Just as you have forsaken Me, and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve the aliens in a land that is not yours”*. Namely, whoever takes for himself a god of anything, he will be as though worship foreign gods.

If you deify food and drinks, *“Your god is your belly”* (Philippians 3: 19). ... If you count the silver of this world as great riches, they are therefore your gods about which the Lord Christ Himself warned, saying: *“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one, and despise the other; you cannot serve God and mammon”* (Luke 16: 13).

- + God promises that if the nation returns and repents, He will not execute His threat; but if they become corrupt and unworthy, He will do as He said. The divine ordinance concerning men in this world basically concerns two nations; of which the Jewish nation come in the first position; Then, after the coming of the Lord Christ, our nation comes in the second position. God threatened the first nation, and, consequently, it was captivated, their city, and temple were destroyed, their altar was defiled, and they lost the sanctuaries they used to possess; for the Lord said to them: “Return to e”, and they did not. Then He spoke to the second nation to edify and to plant them, But, knowing that this latter nation is formed of those who were prone to fall and corrupt, He threatened them, as well, saying: [Although, at the beginning, I spoke about planting you, yet, in case you sin, you will certainly end up like the former nation].

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 7.

PROCLAIM YOUR DWELLING IN MY DEPTHS, O LORD

- + As Solomon did not boast his works before the foreigners;
But assembled His people in Your temple;
And with the spirit of love and humility, he bowed and spread his hands toward
You;
You responded to his prayer with Your amazing fire;
Which consumed no one;
But only the sacrifices they offered, to proclaim Your pleasure and acceptance;
To confirm to them that You are the Forgiver of sins and the receiver of offerings;
- + Your glory filled the house, and the priests were terrified before You;
The people worshipped in fear;
And their hearts, before their tongues, uttered praise with an exultant spirit
- + Let Your Holy Spirit proclaim Your presence in my depths;
Nail Your fear in me;
In awe I would encounter You, O Forgiver of sins;
And with confidence, I trust that You will save my soul from corruption;
You fill my depths by the reflection of Your splendor in me;
I cherish Your presence, and my depths bow before You;
I shall no longer remember my sins in despair;
Nor my soul will be disturbed because of my weakness

When I trust that You will accompany me in the journey of my life.
I will ascend, as though with the ladder of the cross to Your paradise;
My soul will praise You, and will not forget Your mercies forever.

- + What sacrifice shall I offer You?
Except by being attached to Your cross?
And holding fast to Your precious blood?

- + You are truly good, wholly good;
Instead of my corruption, You grant me a good nature;
You turn all my affairs to the edification of my soul;
Your right hand holds me, and brings me forth from glory to glory;
It will lift me up, so as not to fear the events of time;
It embraces me, to keep the devil from crawling into me;
Your love and mercy are great, O amazing Redeemer.

- + Instead of my hidden moans and the bitterness of my soul;
You make me join the heavenly choir;
You turn all my emotions, feelings, and energies,
Into a harp on which Your Holy Spirit plays.

- + You turn the days of my sojourn into perpetual feasts;
To make me feel like being in heaven;
Where affliction cannot destroy my soul;
Where covetousness have no authority over me;
By You, earth would turn into heaven;
Your grace brings me up as though to heavenly sanctuaries;

- + Instead of drought, Your Holy Spirit rains Your divine grace over me;
And instead of hunger You satisfy my soul by You, O the bread of life;
Your divine promises transfigure before me;

Your commandments become like jewels to adorn me;
Your statutes provide me with honey;
Nothing will occupy my soul;
But You will sit in it as Your throne.

- + No enemy will lead me captive to his land;
As long as You proclaim Your glory in my heart;
No one will captivate me, as long as You are the Liberator of my soul.

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CHAPTER 8

SOLOMON'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND COMMITMENTS

In the second book of the chronicles the foremost achievement of Solomon, was building the house of the Lord, organizing the worship and ministry in it, beside offering sacrifices and offerings to the Lord. But it did not disregard his other commitments, whether building the royal palace, and building and fortifying the cities, and entering into commercial relationships with other nations.

SOLOMON'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER NATIONS:

In the second chapter, the book refers to Solomon's invitation of the other nations to partake of building the temple, in particular Hiram king of Tyre, and the aliens who were living in the kingdom. If for some political reason or another, he got married to pagan wives, yet he refused to let the daughter of Pharaoh and her entourage live in the city of David, into which the ark of the covenant entered and sanctified.

He had an open mind in his relationship with other nations, and entered with them into commercial relationships, which had an impact on them to experience his wisdom; which was demonstrated by the visit of the queen of Sheba to him.

When the Lord appeared to Solomon in Gibeon, He promised to grant him so much riches and honor, that no other king would be like him all the days of his life (3: 13); Keeping this promise, gave Solomon an exalted fame and admiration among the other nations.

David before him prevailed upon many enemies, and the kingdom in his days greatly extended, but he did not set many constructions beside his own house; Solomon, on the other hand, having inherited such an extended kingdom in an atmosphere of peace, used every chance to increase his wealth and his authority with diplomatic ways; and cared to set many establishments in an extravagant luxury and exaggerated ways.

1-The cities built by Solomon	1 - 6
2- The laborers used by Solomon	7 - 10
3- Solomon cared for his Egyptian wife, yet out of the city of David	11
4- Solomon organizes the ministry in the temple	12 - 16
5- Solomon's commercial relationships with foreign nations	17 - 18

1- THE CITIES BUILT BY SOLOMON:

According to some, Because Solomon was preoccupied with practical constructions, despite being a man of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, he had no time for study and meditation. Yet many of his personal works show his care for the Word of God and meditation in it, through the work of the Holy Spirit who inspired to him to author the holy books of proverbs, the Ecclesiastes, the song of songs, and the wisdom; beside his prayer in the temple that reveals his knowledge of the law, the book of Deuteronomy in particular. All that tell us that his other preoccupations did not make him disregard his studies, readings, and meditation.

"It came to pass at the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the house of the Lord and His own house" (1)

He cared for the temple of the Lord and its annexes, the royal palace, for building and renewing some cities, providing his wife the daughter of Pharaoh with comfort, yet out of

the city of David, caring for the alien workers, the men of war from among his people, and organizing the worship and ministry in the temple.

We see here how Hiram king of Tyre, give cities to Solomon, a reference to the work of the Lord with the church of the new covenant, when magnificent cities are delivered to the church of Christ, to receive faith, and be filled with peace.

The first book of the kings referred to those cities given by the king of Tyre to Solomon (1 Kings 9: 11-13). Yet there was no mention of the fault committed by Solomon in giving twenty cities of the land of Galilee to Hiram, which were so despised by Hiram to call them 'the land of Cabul' , namely (cheap and valueless) (1 kings 9: 11-14). Those cities being within the promised land, that act implied unfaithfulness on the part of Solomon, to deliver the land of the Lord to the Gentiles.

“that the cities which Hiram had given to Solomon, Solomon built them, and he settled the children of Israel there” (2)

“And Solomon went to Hamath Zobah and seized it” (3)

“He also built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the storage cities which he built in Hamath” (4)

“He built upper Beth Horon and lower Beth Horon, fortified cities with walls, gates, and bars” (5)

“also Baalath and all the storage cities that Solomon had, and all the chariot cities of the cavalry, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and throughout all the land of his dominion” (6)

The Lord allowed Solomon, not only to build what the State required, but all his heart's desire. Yet he has done that with exaggerated extravagance, beside marrying many wives for one reason or another, which required collecting more taxes and an increase of the burden on the people, that ultimately led to the division of the kingdom directly

after his death, and the reign of his son Rehoboam on his throne; when ten tribes joined his rival Jeroboam who reigned on the northern kingdom.

Although that was mentioned in the book of the kings, yet the book of the chronicles concentrated on the shining side concerning the worship, leaving the weaknesses of Solomon and his failings to the book of the kings.

2- THE LABORERS USED BY SOLOMON:

As a king, a leader, and a business man, Solomon did not seek his own comfort, but used many hands; he perceived that for his people's sake, he should encourage work by every means,

“All the people who were left of the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, who were not of Israel” (7)

“(that is their descendants who were left in the land after them, whom the children of Israel did not destroy), from these, Solomon raised forced labor, as it is to this day” (8)

There were a multitude of Canaanite aliens, who were allowed to live among the people of Israel, but not without work.

“But Solomon did not make the children of Israel servants for his work. Some were men of war, captains of his officers, captains of his chariots, and his cavalry” (9)

“And others were chiefs of the officials of king Solomon: two hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people” (10)

3- SOLOMON CARED FOR HIS EGYPTIAN WIFE, YET, OUT OF THE CITY OF DAVID:

“Now Solomon brought the daughter of Pharaoh up from the city of David to the house he had built for her, for he said, ‘My wife shall not dwell in the house of king David of Israel, because the places to which the ark of the Lord has come are holy” (11)

According to the book of the kings (1 Kings 9: 24), moving the daughter of Pharaoh from the city of David to the house Solomon built for her, was a kind of special privilege, But according to the book of the chronicles, that cares for the worship and holiness, it was not befitting to let her stay in the city of David, even if she received faith in the living God, on account of that, among her maidservants who came with her from Egypt, there might be some pagans.

The relationship between Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh carried a symbolic meaning. The kings of Egypt used to give his daughters born by maiden servants, who had no right for the throne, of Egypt, to the kings of other nations. But to Solomon, Pharaoh gave him his own legitimate daughter, in marriage. She had the right to sit on the throne of Egypt if she had no son to inherit the throne. Marriage here was a confirmation that Solomon himself had the right in the land of Egypt; which refers to the submission of many kings and leaders to the Lord Christ, through their acceptance of faith in Him.

Solomon built a palace for the daughter of Pharaoh, to which he brought her up, together with her entourage; for fear that his Egyptian wife and her entourage might do something unfitting to the holiness of the city of David. The queen could have been a proselyte and with her or with one of her entourage, there probably be some idols from Egypt. Despite his good relationships with the Gentiles, Solomon refused to let the daughter of Pharaoh live where the ark of the covenant has been, even if she received faith in the living God, for fear that one of her maiden servants who came with her from Egypt might be a non-believer.

3- SOLOMON ORGANIZES THE MINISTRY IN THE TEMPLE:

The religious ministries were mentioned in verses 12 – 16 of the eighth chapter of the book of the chronicles, particularly the burnt offerings, which were not included in the book of the kings. Although there was no mention of the details of what Solomon has done, there was a confirmation that he cared for organizing the daily, the monthly, and the annual ministry in the temple, particularly the burnt offerings and the praise.

“Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of the Lord he had built before the vestibule” (!2)

“according to the daily rate, offering according to the commandment of Moses, for the Sabbaths, the new moon, and the three appointed yearly feasts – the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of the Weeks, and the feast of tabernacles” (13)

Solomon's role did not stop at building the temple and celebrating its dedication, but continued caring for offering daily offerings, weekly ones every Sabbath (double the daily offerings), monthly offerings in the new moons, and annual offerings in the three major feasts.

Solomon's heart was kindled, longing to carry out the religious rites of offering sacrifices, incense, and praise, according to the law, through the priests and the Levites. During that period, before his perversion behind his pagan wives, he did not practice the worship as a literal routine, but, together with his commitment to do everything according to the law, he did everything with his whole inner being, enjoying a fellowship with God, through praying and heavenly thoughts throughout the shadow of the old covenant.

So attached to God, Solomon, together with the prophet Jeremiah, felt that God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3: 23); as though to say: "*The Lord is my portion*", says my soul, therefore I hope in Him" (Lamentation 3: 24).

- + The burnt offering is the sacrifice wholly consumed by fire on the altar.
I wish the divine fire raises us up high by the fire of wisdom, and ignite us wholly.
Not just our souls, but our bodies as well, to have eternity. Let it be offered as burnt offering, for death to be swallowed.

(St. Augustine)

- + As both the body and soul, namely man in his wholeness, desire to become a holy sacrifice to God, the Psalmist proclaims that "*the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit*" (Psalm 51: 17)
- + Let us then offer our souls a sacrifice by fasting; for there is nothing better to offer to God, which is confirmed by the prophet saying: "*A broken and a contrite heart – these O God, You will not despise*". Offer yourself to God, O man; Offer the offering of fasting; make yourself a pure sacrifice, a holy sacrifice, and a living sacrifice, that remains yours, even while offering it to God.

(Father Peter Chrystologus)

- + He said to them: "*For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices; but this is what I commanded them: ... Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor, and do not love a false oath*" (Jeremiah 7: 22, 23; Zechariah 8: 17) ... He means to say that the contrite heart is a sweet fragrance to the Lord who created him.

(The epistle of Barnabas)

- + That was the reason the righteous 'Job' used to offer burnt offerings for the sake of his children, lest they might have unintentionally erred toward God in their thoughts.

(St. Jerome)

- + I had fear in all my works, knowing that You would never justify me when guilty.
"Job' would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of all his sons; for he said; 'It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts'" (Job 1: 6)

(Pope Gregory the Great)

- + It was necessary for Christ, the Savior of all to carry the cross, as it is said about him on the tongue of Isaiah: *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor; Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"* (Isaiah 9: 6). The cross is His government, by which He became a King over the world; *"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2: 8-11).

When the blessed man Abraham ascended the mountain to offer His son Isaac a burnt offering according to the command of God, he put the wood over his son, as a symbol of Christ who will carry the cross on His shoulders. The passion of Christ are therefore His glories, as He, Himself, taught us, saying: *“Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him”* (John 13: 31).

(St. Cyril the Great)

“And according to the order of David his father, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, the Levites for their duties (to praise and serve before the priests) as the duty of each day required, and the gatekeepers by their divisions at each gate; for so David the man of God had commanded” (14)

Solomon continued to offer the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, changed nothing of the order put by his father David, did not cease, but did it day after day.

“The man of God”, a general expression in the two books of the kings, although rarely mentioned in those of the chronicles, said only about Moses (1 Chronicles 28: 14), about David and another prophet (2 Chronicles 25:7, 9).

+ It is befitting of the heart and mouth of the Christian not to cease praising God; not to glorify Him in case of prosperity, and grumble against Him in affliction.

+ He who readily pray, praises in his heart, even though his tongue could be silent. Whereas if man prays without longing, he would be considered as mute before God, even though his voice may reach other men.

- + Now, gathering together in the church, we praise God; but once everyone of us go back to work, he seems as though he ceased to praise God. I wish one never cease to walk uprightly, to be praising God all the time. You cease to praise God when you pervert from justice and from everything that bring pleasure to God; but if you persist on the upright life, your life will be eloquent, and God's ears will open to your heart.
- + All what you do, do good, for by this you praise God.
- + There, we will find comfort, we will love, and we will praise.

(St. Augustine)

- + How beautiful are those who sing the secrets of the Lord. I wish I, as well, imitate them in their prayer ... Do not despise a spiritual song, and do not disregard listening to it.

(St. Methodeus bishop of Olymbus)

- + Make the evening musical.... Sing by the Spirit, and by understanding. Sing the psalms.

(St. Jerome)

- + The kingdom of God is within you; namely the joy planted by the Holy Spirit in your hearts, being an icon and a deposit of the eternal joy, enjoyed by the souls of the saints.

(St. Gregory bishop of Nyssa)

“They did not depart from the command of the king to the priests and Levites concerning any matter or concerning the treasuries”

(15)

“Now all the work of Solomon was well-ordered from the day of the foundation of the house of the Lord until it was finished. So the house of the Lord was completed” (16)

4- SOLOMON’S COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOREIGN NATIONS:

Hiram king of Tyre contributed, not only in building the temple, but to the prosperity of the glorious kingdom of Solomon.

“Then Solomon went to Ezion Gaber and Elath on the seacoast in the land of Edom” (17)

“Ezion Gaber”, is on the Gulf of Aquaba, near Elath.

“And Hiram sent him ships by the hand of his servants, and the servants who knew the sea. They went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and acquired four hundred and fifty talents of gold from there, and brought it to king Solomon”

(18)

Caring for the international trade, Solomon built a maritime fleet; and resorted to Hiram king of Tyre to provide him with experts to manage and run the fleet, for his servants know the sea; while the experience of the Jews was confined to the lakes..

He visited the ports of Elath, Ezion Gaber to examine the situation and to enter into international commercial relationships.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 8

LET ME OFFER YOU A DAILY OFFERING, AND UNCEASING PRAISE, O LORD

- + Solomon built a magnificent temple that drew the attention of many;
All assumed that it will endure to the end of time;
And set great establishments as well;
He built cities and strongholds;
What remained of all that?!
Even the temple that represented Your presence among Your people,
Has been utterly burnt down to the foundations.

- + Nothing remained but the pure hearts that followed the lead of David's heart;
The sacrifices of love, burnt offerings of praise, and the incense of the pure
prayers, only remained;
Turn my life into a sacrifice of love;
Let my whole being become a spiritual harp;
That sounds a unique symphony;
That harmonizes with the praises of the heavenly hosts.

- + When shall I encounter You on the clouds?
When shall I join the heavenly choir?!
When shall I sing the new song of Your love?!
I wonder, by what language shall I sing in heaven, Oh my Beloved?!
And what sacrifice shall I offer before Your holy throne?!

CHAPTER 9

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA AND SOLOMON'S INTERNATIONAL FAME

This final chapter of the biography of Solomon in this book, parades his international fame, particularly the queen of Sheba's visit to him. This chapter came exactly conforming to what came in (1 Kings 10), a verse by verse, with the exception of the two verses 1 – 2; And the three last verses which were quoted from (1 Kings 11: 41-43)

Sheba was a developed and a rich country at Southern Arabia; And the queen brought with her very precious gifts as samples of what her country can give (Isaiah 60: 6; Jeremiah 6: 20' Ezekiel 38: 13).

Sheba had a foremost importance in these days, for all the ships sailing toward the south or to the Indian Ocean pass through Sheba.

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1- The queen of Sheba visits Solomon, and honors him | 1 - 12 |
| 2- The greatness of Solomon's court and his riches | 13 -
28 |
| 3- The end of Solomon's reign | 29 –
31 |

1- THE QUEEN OF SHEBA VISITS SOLOMON, AND HONORS HIM:

This episode was written in detail in the first book of the kings; And the Lord Christ Himself referred to it (Matthew 12: 42). In this episode it is to be noticed:

- 1- The encounter of the queen of Sheba with king Solomon is considered an invitation directed to every man to encounter Him, who is greater than

Solomon, the Wisdom of God Himself, the Creator of Solomon, who granted him the wisdom. The Lord Christ admonished the Jews who rejected Him, when the queen of Sheba, a Gentile, came from afar to listen to His wisdom.

What the queen of Sheba enjoyed through her encounter with Solomon is, however, not to be compared with what we enjoy through our encounter and fellowship of the Lord and Savior of Solomon.

- 2- Solomon did not invite the queen of Sheba to visit him; and she was not in need to come all the way from her far country to investigate the facts concerning Solomon; but she hastened to see by her own eyes (6). She was drawn by his glory and his personality that drew many, even kings. He was unique among the kings of an international fame, in that he did not have his fame through wars and violence, but by the spirit of wisdom and peace given to him by God. His reign endured forty years with no war against any nation or people; and on another aspect, his relationship with the kings and peoples bore mutual respect.

Encountering Solomon, the queen of Sheba perceived that what she saw by her own eyes surpassed what she heard about him. ... When our Christ proclaims His glory in us, His sweet fragrance in us will testify to us, to make us *“ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear”* (1 Peter 3: 15).

- 3- Hiram king of Tyre, although he has provided Solomon with a plenty of gold, wood, building materials, and experts in building and laborers; yet he did not care to go to Solomon to learn wisdom; as the queen of Sheba did.
- 4- The queen of Sheba exulted when she encountered king Solomon; a reference to the Lord Christ, the Fountain of joy for all who encounter Him.

- 5- The queen of Sheba blessed all those who perpetually stand before Solomon, on account of that they see his face and listen to his wisdom.
- 6- She was impressed by His great authority over all the kings from the River to the land of the Philistines (26)... Indeed, those who honor God, will be honored by God (1 Samuel 2: 30). Solomon has greatly honored God, by building decorating the temple; giving God praise and thanksgiving, and by dedicating what God granted him of wisdom and riches to the account of the kingdom of God and the service of His people.
- 7- The queen of Sheba endured much trouble and expenses to hear the wisdom of Solomon, yet she counted that she was greatly rewarded. Solomon's wisdom bore a symbol of the Hypostasis of wisdom, our Lord Jesus Christ, He who draws the souls, and brings them forth into the bosom of God the Father.
- 8- Solomon knew how to kindle the gift freely given to him, by sharing it with others. He was not preoccupied by the enormity of the gifts he has got, as much as he was preoccupied by letting all enjoy the wisdom of God.
- 9- The queen of Sheba was greatly impressed by the good ordinance of Solomon's household, co-workers, and servants; And according to some, his talk about wisdom or organizing the worship of God; which drew her heart to the Lord Christ, the unique atoning Sacrifice, capable to consummate the salvation to all who come to Him..
- 10- Solomon's impact by His wisdom in the Lord, was not only on his servants, but extended to their sons, who cherished being called "*the sons of Solomon's servants*" (Ezra 2: 55; Nehemiah 7: 57).

11-Presenting a living example of the true love, the queen of Sheba praised God for His work with the people of Israel through king Solomon (8).

“Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test Solomon with hard questions, having a very great retinue, camels that bore spices, gold in abundance, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart” (1)

Hearing about Solomon from the merchants who, with their ships pass through Sheba, the queen of Sheba presents a living portrait of the true believer from many aspects.

The queen of Sheba, not satisfied with what she heard about Solomon, but moved to encounter him and test him, not in doubt of what she heard, or she would not come with such an abundance of precious gifts, but came to enjoy getting to know him in person. In that she symbolized the Magi who, when they saw the star, they moved with their gifts toward Jerusalem to encounter the newly born king of the Jews, and to worship Him. On the contrary, when king Herod assembled the high priests and the scribes (Matthew 2: 4) to ask them: *“where will Christ be born?”*, they gave him the prophecy, but did not care to move to encounter the newly born Christ.

+ The Magi preparing gifts to honor the newly born king; the Truth instructed them what they should do;

They opened up their treasures; the gold, for He is a great king; the myrrh, for he will be killed; and the frankincense to honor Him as God.

They joyfully carried the treasures of their fathers, to give their offerings to the great King;

While walking their way, they preached the good news, that a great king has shined over the whole world;

Wherever they traveled or dwelt, they told His story, saying; 'We are heading toward the Mighty One born in Judea';

Wherever they came or departed, they planted the good news of His birth.

Their preaching was distributed along their way, and their news were sung.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The queen of Sheba told Solomon all what was in her heart, and he told her all what she sought to know (2). An exchange that represents the relationship of the soul with her Christ. On her side, the soul reveals what is in her heart; and on His side, her Christ tells her His divine secrets which she desires to know.

It is befitting of the believer to open his heart up before his Savior, and to enter with him into an open debate.

“So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for Solomon that he could not explain it to her” (2)

When the believer opens his heart up to talk with his Savior, the way the queen of Sheba did with king Solomon, the Lord of glory will open up to him His hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2: 3), and will hide nothing from him.

- + The Son of God was called “*Messenger of the great Counsel*” for the sake of the things He taught, He proclaimed to men in particular about the Father, saying: “*I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world*” (John 17: 6); He manifested His name by words and deeds.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + There is no knowledge without faith, nor faith without knowledge; ... The Son is the true Teacher about the Father. ... We believe in the Son to know the Father, with whom is also the Son.... Again, in order to know the Father, we have to believe in the Son, for He is the Father's Son. Knowledge of the Father and the Son, the way of the true Gnostic, is to know the Truth through the truth ... Indeed, few are those who believe and know.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- + The divine Word was sent as a Physician for the sinners, and as a Teacher of the divine secrets, to those who are pure and without sin.

(The scholar Origen)

- + A great Teacher descended from heaven, to instruct the world that was enlightened by His teaching, so that men will no more desire the vain things.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

- + Now, beloved brethren, take heed of what the apostle gives you of precious counsel, saying: "*As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught*" (Colossians 2: 6, 7).As in such a simple and sure faith, we ought to strongly abide, until He opens Himself up to

the believers hidden in Him, according to the same apostle, saying: “*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2: 3); which He hides from no one to reject, but to stir up in them the longing for the hidden things..

(St. Augustine)

“And the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he built” (3)

“the food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters, and their apparel, his cupbearers and their apparel, and his entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her” (4)

The report concerning her visit to Solomon, reveals, not only the greatness of Solomon’s palace, but the way of life going on in his royal court, from the food offered on his table, to the sitting of his servants, to their behavior and apparel.

The Holy Book did not mention that the queen of Sheba had the privilege of visiting the temple, being the greatest of Solomon’s achievements; but his care not to let his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh dwell in the city of David, would tell us that Solomon did not give the queen of Sheba non-believer Gentile, the chance to visit the holy house of the Lord. ...

She knew all about the multitude of burnt offerings through the priests. Her impression with what she saw and heard was expressed in one sentence: “*There was no more spirit in her*” (4).

Yet what she saw, heard, and touched, was no more than a shadow of what the apostle Paul has actually experienced, he who “*heard inexpressible words*” (2 Corinthians 12: 4).

She perceived that Solomon, his household, and his servants were the happiest on the face of the earth. ... That would refer to what St. John Chrysostom said that the Christian is the happiest man on earth.

“Then she said to the king: ‘It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom’ (5)

“However I did not believe their words until I came and saw with my own eyes, and indeed, the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told me. You exceed the fame which I heard” (6).

The great difference between what the queen of Sheba heard about the wisdom of Solomon, and what she saw by her own eyes when she encountered him, made her glorify the Lord who granted him such a great gift.

+ All the people of Israel shouted loud to glorify the Lord who granted Solomon such wisdom, saying:

Blessed be the Lord who kept His love to His servant David, made his son a king after him, and filled him with wisdom.

Who glorified the throne of Solomon over Israel, and made his fame spread all over the world.

Who let the queen of Sheba come from her far country to test his wisdom (1 Kings 10), carrying with her such an abundance of spices.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom” (7)

Unable to express how impressed she was with the person of Solomon himself, and perceiving that he is greater than any praise, the queen of Sheba, blessed his servants who continually stand before him and enjoy hearing his wisdom.

That is how the Lord Christ proclaimed to those who became attached to Him, and saw Him, saying to them: "*Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see*" (Luke 10: 23).

"Blessed by the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on His throne to be king for the Lord your God! Because the Lord has loved Israel, to establish them forever, therefore He made you king over them, to do justice and righteousness" (8)

The queen of Sheba perceived that the Lord was so delighted in His people, to set Solomon on the throne to do justice and righteousness. ... Yet, later on, Solomon got too far in burdening his people with taxes to spend on his projects and constructions; ... The Lord Christ on the other hand, reigned upon humanity, delivered Himself for the sake of the salvation of men, and granted them His righteousness, as their own righteousness.

+ The Lord Christ was the Goodness anticipated by the people.

(The scholar Origen)

+ We, who have Christ -- the source of all the necessities -- dwell in our hearts, have been enriched with all kinds of virtues, and have come to have an abundance of steadfast spiritual gifts.

(St. Cyril the Great)

+ What is the meaning of: “***Of His fullness we have all received***” (John 1: 16)?

St. John means to say that the Lord does not possess His gifts through partnership; but being His own Fountain; the source of life itself; light itself; and truth itself; He stores the riches of His goodness in Himself, and flows it on all; but, giving to others, He remains on His fullness without decrease, continues to flow, and to let the others partake of His blessings, yet stays on His perfection as He is. ... On the contrary, what I acquire is through partnership with others, a little portion of all, like a drop of water compared to a limitless sea.

Let us consider a source of fire, from which tens of thousands of candles are lighted ... Will the source of fire not remain on its fullness after providing all those candles from what it has? Will it decrease in intensity?

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in great abundance, and precious stones; there never were any spices such as those the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon” (9)

What the queen of Sheba did by giving so many gifts to Solomon, was a symbol of what the alien Magi are going to give to the exalted infant Lord Christ.

“Also, the servants of Hiram and the servants of Solomon, who brought gold from Ophir, brought algum wood and precious stones” (10)

“And the king made walkways of the algum wood for the house of the Lord and for the king’s house, also harps and stringed instruments for singers; and there were none such as these seen before in the land of Judah” (11)

“Now king Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all she desired, whatever she asked, much more than she had brought to the king. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants” (12)

2- THE GREATNESS OF SOLOMON’S COURT AND HIS RICHES:

If God the wholly rich, gave of His glory, power, and wisdom to Solomon, He poured of what are His on His beloved. History did not mention a king as rich and glorified as Solomon, beside his wisdom and ability to create an atmosphere of peace with all the nations and peoples in his time.... Yet the Lord Christ says: *“Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of the lilies in the field, which today is, and tomorrow will dry up”* (Matthew 6: 29).

Mentioning nothing in this book concerning the perversions and fall of Solomon that came in the first book of the kings, the Holy Book provides us with an important lesson, that, even though the great and the wise may fall, and their fall could be serious, yet it is not up to us to persist on defaming them. And on another aspect, Solomon probably repented on them, and hence the book kept silent on account of that his sins were forgiven (See Ezekiel 33: 16). God in His love for us, will not remember our sins, if we return to Him and forsake the way of evil.

“The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold” (13)

This quantity is equal to 25 tons of gold. Yet we find Solomon the sage describe all riches as *“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity”* (Ecclesiastes 1: 2); and in the book of proverbs he says: *“Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble; Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted calf with hatred”* (Proverb 15: 16-17). The queen of Sheba most probably heard him quote these proverbs while showing her the treasures contained in his palaces, *“that there was no more spirit in her”* (4).

“besides what the traveling merchants and traders brought. And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon” (14)

“And king Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold, ; six hundred shekels of hammered gold went into each shield” (15)

God promised to give Solomon wisdom together with riches and glory. (3: 13). Riches in itself is not a sin; for Abraham was exceedingly rich, and left his wealth to his son Isaac (Genesis 24: 34-36). It is the love of wealth that is a sin (See 1 Timothy 6: 7-10). Solomon himself wrote: *“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity”* (Ecclesiastes 5: 10)

“He also made three hundred shields of hammered gold; three hundred shekels of gold went into each shield. The king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon” (16)

“Moreover the king made a throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold” (17)

“The throne had six steps, with a footstool of gold, which were fastened to the throne; there were armrests on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrest” (18)

While Solomon’s feet rested on pure gold; It was said about the Lord Christ:
“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne (Psalm 89: 14; see Psalm 97: 2).

“Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps, nothing like this had had been made for any other kingdom” (19)

To confirm his riches and power, Solomon adorned his throne with statutes of lions; Whereas, to proclaim His possibilities, the Lord Christ granted His disciples the authority to trample upon the devil and the hosts of darkness, and not to fear the roaring lion who walks about seeking whom it may devour (1 Peter 5: 8).

+ Do you intend to be a virgin? ... Prevail upon the flesh and its desires; upon the world in the Spirit of God; upon the vain temporal things that will eventually grow old, corrupt, and come to an end; upon the dragon (Revelations 12: 7); upon the lion (1 Peter 5: 8); and upon the serpent (2 Corinthians 11: 3). Prevail upon the devil by Jesus Christ who helps you; through listening to His words, and enjoying the Eucharist in God; Carry His cross and follow Him (Matthew 26: 24); for it is Jesus Christ your Lord who will purify you.

(St. Clement the Roman)

- + After your conquests that come from His conquests, the angels will receive, glorify, and serve you, as your guards in every aspect.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“All king Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. Not one was of silver, for this was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon” (20)

To show off his greatness Solomon used vessels made of gold. The greatness of our Christ, on the other hand, is demonstrated by setting us -- men of dust -- as heavenly creatures; for gold refers to heaven.

- + He was born in a manger to lift you up to the altar.
He came down to earth, to lift you up to heaven.
He found no place for himself except a manger, to prepare mansions for you in heaven (John 14: 2); as according to the apostle: *“Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich”* (2 Corinthians 8: 9). My inheritance is the poverty of Christ, and my strength is His weakness.

“For the king’s ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram. Once every three years the merchant ships came, bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys” (21)

“So king Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (22)

While Solomon became great with riches, glory, and wisdom, things granted to him by God. Our Christ became for us riches, satiety, and wisdom..

+ Who will be our support? Jesus Christ, the Word and the Wisdom of God; He will support us, not for one day or two days, but forever.

(The scholar Origen)

+ He who truly believes, will completely be united with Him, in whom are the truth, the Godhead, the Essence, the Life, and the Wisdom; and all these will be in him, as well, and not in the non-believer; For without the Son of God, you will have no existence nor name; the powerful will be without power, and the wise will be without wisdom; For *“Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 1: 34). He who thinks he can see the One God without power, truth, wisdom, life, nor true light, would be, either sees nothing at all, or surely sees what is evil.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

“And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart” (23)

All the kings of the earth desired to listen to Solomon because of the wisdom granted to him by God. The believers whom the Lord, the King of kings, set as kings, seek His face to acquire Him, being the wisdom of God.

“Each man brought his present: articles of silver and gold, garments, armor, spices, horses, and mules, at a set rate, year by year” (24)

“Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem” (25)

Here, Solomon did not give heed to the warning of the law to the king, saying: *“He is not to multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses” (Deuteronomy 17: 16)*

“So he reigned over the kings from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt” (26)

“The king made silver as common as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland” (27)

“And they brought horses to Solomon from Egypt and from all lands” (28)

3- THE END OF SOLOMON’S REIGN:

“Now the rest of the act of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo

the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat” (29)

“Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years”
(30)

“Then Solomon rested with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place” (31)

The book came to the end of its talk about Solomon without mentioning his falls concerning his love of pagan women, and his perversion to idol-worship through them; on account of that his kingdom, being a symbol of the kingdom of Christ, is committed to be holy, and without sin, shining with the splendor of the Sun of Righteousness.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 9

LET ME ENCOUNTER AND ACQUIRE YOU, O WISDOM OF GOD

- + Having heard about Solomon, the queen of Sheba set forth to visit him;
Hearing about his wisdom, she came carrying an abundance of gifts;
Behold, the Lord of Solomon came down to me;
To call me to unite with Him, and to enjoy the fellowship of His glory.

- + Allow me to reveal all what is in my heart;
By Your Holy Spirit, I sit at Your footstool;
To meditate in You, o Groom of my soul;
To hear Your voice and enjoy Your splendor;

My heart dissolves with love for You;
I desire that all humanity are drawn to You.

+ Encountering those working in Solomon's court,
The queen of Sheba was so impressed by them;
To bless all who work for him, and who listen to his wisdom;
As for You, You open before me the gates of Your heavens
I bless the prophets, the apostles, the disciples, and all believers;
I desire to praise You together with them, as well as with all the heavenly
hosts

In paradise, I see robbers who became saints;
And get in touch with Your grace that, out of those of dust, it set almost
heavenlies

I stand in awe before Your exalted grace;
The queen of Sheba counted all those around Solomon as the happiest on
earth;

Behold, I see Your church, the unique bride;
Carrying the reflection of Your splendor, You who is fairer than the sons of
men;

By Your light, You took darkness away from her;
And by Your grace, she bears Your righteousness;
By Your cross she came to be the queen sitting on Your right hand.

+ Her dwelling place came to be with You in heaven;
Where the lion could not crawl to devour her
Where the enemy will find nothing for him in her;
For You are her light, glory, riches, and happiness;
For her You are everything, to need nothing more;

+ Grant me to attach myself to You and acquire you
I shall never forsake You; but You will dwell in me, and I in You;

Glory be to you, O the power and wisdom of God;
By You I experience the deposit of Your heavens;
By You, my heart and mind are lifted up as though to heaven;
By You, I live happy, whatever the troubles of the world are;
You lift me up from glory to glory.



THE SECOND SECTION

THE KINGS WHO CAME AFTER SOLOMON

(Chapters 10 to 36)

FROM REHOBOAM TO THE CAPTIVITY

THE SUCCESSORS OF SOLOMON:

The person of David, the godly suffering king was the center of the first book of the chronicles, he whose heart desire was to build a house for the Lord; but his

request was rejected on account of that he was a man of wars, even though they were for the account of the glory of God. But he got a divine promise that his son Solomon will fulfill his heart's desire. The first nine chapters of the present book came to show Solomon's care for building the temple; and that his only mission was to realize this work, particularly that he came as a king of peace.

Now, the rest of the book came about the successors of Solomon as kings of Judah, until the fall of that kingdom under the Babylonian captivity; then the divine promise was fulfilled by the return from captivity after seventy years.

This book was almost dedicated to the kingdom of Judah, and disregarded to a great extent the northern kingdom, that dissented and opposed the house of David. ... In the history of that era, it is to be noticed:

- 1- Caring completely to omit the faults of Solomon, to show that the true King, who builds the house of God is the Son of David, the King of peace, who is without sin, about whom is said: "*I will be His Father, And He will be My Son*" (2 Samuel 7: 14); and, "*You are My Son; Today I have begotten You*" (Psalm 2: 7); which could not apply to David nor to Solomon, but only to the incarnate Wisdom of God, the only begotten Son of God, the Savior of the world, of the seed of David according to the flesh; hence came the divine promise "*to give a lamp to Him and to His sons forever*" (2 Chronicles 21: 7).

This lamp remained in the royal house, though sometimes very faint, until the coming of the promised Son in the midst of the pitch darkness, to shine with His light on those sitting in the darkness.

The devil exerted all effort to put that lamp out before the coming of the Son of David, but the grace of God worked all along the generations, for the One to come who will destroy the kingdom of the devil, and liberate humanity from his captivation through the cross.

2- During that period, the devil assumed that he could put the lamp completely out through the wicked kings (of Judah), like Jehoram, Ahaziah, Ahaz, and others; that in the days of Ahaziah no one remained of the seed of

David except a little infant who was rescued of the massacre of the royal house. It was not possible for the devil with all his violence, cruelty, and deception, to stand against the grace of God working to the account of the salvation of humanity; as according to the prophet: *“Who is God like you, pardoning iniquity, and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities”* (Micah 7: 17-18).

3- After the return from captivity, the line of David’s household continued, though no kings were among them, and they gradually lost their temporal privileges and possibilities; until it was the time for that godly young girl, betrothed to a poor carpenter, to carry in her womb the King of kings, the Messiah Savior of the world, the King of Righteousness. By the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension of the Son of David to heaven, He reigned on the hearts of the believers from the Jews and the Gentiles with no partiality; And behold, He prepares the place for the bride queen to sit forever on His right side.

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM:

The tenth chapter is considered as the line separating between the reign of David and Solomon, on the one hand, when all the tribes were unified under the name *“the children of Israel”*, and on the other hand, the division of the kingdom into two kingdoms: the southern kingdom of Judah with the two tribes of Judah and

Benjamin, and the northern kingdom of Israel with the ten other tribes. Here we notice the following:

- 1- The tribe of Benjamin, to which the rejected king Saul, the oppressor of David, belongs, came to be the only tribe to unite with Judah. The grace of God turned the animosity stirred up by Saul against David into a friendship between the two tribes; Or let us say it was a reward to David after his departure, for his amazing love for Saul, despite his hatred, realized in his children and grandchildren,
- 2- This book is only preoccupied with the tribe of Judah, being the representative of the people of God, out of whom will come the King of Peace incarnate. Any talk about the Northern kingdom of Israel, came in what concern its relationship with the kingdom of Judah.
- 3- The Northern kingdom covering nine reigning families; on which assassinations dominated to take the throne by force, lasted 250 years; whereas the Southern kingdom lasted for 350 years, holding fast to the royal family of the household of David, to whom the divine promise to David, was to keep his kingdom forever, if they keep His commandments. The Lord Christ was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, as the King of kings who reigns forever.

Despite the faults committed by some of the kings of David's household, yet there among them were kings who cared for the worship of the living God.

- 4- The chapters 10 to 26, gave us a record of the kings of Judah: nine of them were good kings, and ten wicked ones:

Manasseh, who reigned for 55 years, as the most wicked of the kings of Judah, yet he ended his life as one of the good kings through his return to God.

Rehoboam, who rejected the counsel of the godly elders, and followed that of his wicked friends. In his days the kingdom divided, and he lost ten tribes. Although he attempted to strengthen the kingdom, yet he got back

to disobey God's law and statutes (Chapter 12); closed his ears shut to the good counsel; and closed them shut to God's voice.

Jehoram, in whose heart envy crawled, and he killed his brothers with the sword, together with some leaders of Israel.. Following the lead of the Gentiles, he worshipped on the high places, he started by worshipping the Lord, but idol-worship soon crawled into Judah, and as a fruition of his perversion, the Philistines invaded them

Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28), increased his evil to the extent of offering his own sons as burnt offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom like the Gentiles. Hence God allowed the Aramites to prevail upon him, and to captivate a multitude of his people.

Yet God sent good kings to correct what the wicked ones corrupted.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE REFORM:

- 1- The return to God, and the renewal of the covenant with Him, on the level of the king, the leaders, and the people
- 2- The consistence on keeping the commandment (15: 12-15)
- 3- The care for the ministry of teaching (Jehoshaphat 17: 7-9)
- 4- Giving back the rights of God (Joash 24: 4-5)
- 5- The purification of the temple (Josiah 34: 14)
- 6- A return to listen to the Word of God (34: 29-31)

THE PROPHETS OF THAT ERA:

Because of the violent oppression of the devil against the house of David; so that no one of them would come to reign forever; and because of the lack of faithfulness of the kings themselves from this house; that era from the division of the kingdom to the Babylonian captivity, was featured by the appearance of many prophets, who came to confirm God's plan of salvation, the coming of the

King of Righteousness, the Son of David; and to open up the door of hope. At the same time, they came to warn the kings, the priests, and the people against their persistence on disobedience and disregarding the divine commandment, and to proclaim God's chastisement that was going to dwell upon them. Among those prophets were:

- 1- The prophet Nathan (9: 29)
- 2- Ahijah the Shilonite (9: 29; 10: 15)
- 3- Iddo the seer (9: 29; 12: 15;13: 22)
- 4- Shemaiah, the man of God (1: 2; 12: 5, 15)
- 5- Azariah the son of Oded ((15: 1)
- 6- Oded (15: 8)
- 7- Hanani the seer (16: 7)
- 8- Micah (Micaiah) the son of Imla (1: 7)
- 9- Jehu the son of Hanan the seer (19: 2; 20: 34)
- 10- Jahaziel the son of Zechariah (20: 14; 20: 34)
- 11-Eliezer the son of Dodavah (20: 37)
- 12-Elijah the prophet (21: 12)
- 13- Some of the prophets and Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (24: 19-20)
- 14-The man of God (25: 7)
- 15-A prophet (25: 15)
- 16- Zechariah the seer (26: 56)
- 17- Isaiah the son of Amoz (26: 22; 32: 32)
- 18- Micah of Moresheth (Jeremiah 26: 18)
- 19-Some seers (prophets) (33: 18-19;m 2 Kings 21: 10)
- 20-Huldah the prophetess (34: 22)
- 21-Jeremiah (35: 25; 36: 12,, 21)
- 22-Apostles and prophets (36: 15-16);
- 23- Urijah the son of Shimaiah (Jeremiah 26: 20)

To portray the extent of the oppression of the leaderships and the people against the prophets, the Lord Christ said: *“Now when vintage time drew near, (the owner of the vineyard) sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took the servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them”* (Matthew 21: 34-36)

CHAPTER 10

A DISSENSION IN THE ERA OF REHOBOAM

The books of chronicles disregarded the faults done by both David and Solomon, not to cover them up, but to present the two kings being symbols of the Messiah King, who alone is without sin. Now it talks about the dissension that happened in the days of Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 10: 15).

The circumstances that led to the division of the kingdom are recorded in (1 Kings 2: 1-24) in the same way it came here; with the exception that the book of the kings cared for recording the **origin** of the kingdom of Israel; whereas the book of the chronicles cared for that of the kingdom of Judah.

While the Holy Book tells about Solomon that he was the richest in wisdom among the kings of Israel, Unfortunately his son Rehoboam, unwisely walked according to the counsel of the wicked, with violence and cruelty; rejecting the counsel of the elders of experience; contrary to one of the main principles that the book of the proverb, written by Solomon the sage concentrated on..

1- The foolishness of Rehoboam	1
2- The extremism of the dissenters	2 - 15
3- Their rejection of Rehoboam	16 – 19

1- THE FOOLISHNESS OF REHOBOAM:

“And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king” (1)

'Rehoboam', was the only son that history referred to Solomon. He was born by 'Naamah' the Ammonitess (1 King 14: 31), who was probably the daughter of Hanun king of the Ammonites. 'Thehoboam' means (The prosperity of the people) was so called as a memorial of the consummation of the possession of the promised land that was not taken until the last days of David (See Exodus 34: 24).. About him it was said that because of his lack of wisdom, the kingdom was divided into two.

According to some, Solomon was speaking about himself when he said: "*He who begets a coffer does so to his sorrow; and the father of a fool has no joy*" (Proverb 17: 21). His soul was mournful in his last days when he perceived that he will leave his kingdom to a son with no understanding, saying: "*Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool. Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled, and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.... For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil*" (Ecclesiastes 2: 18-19, 21)

While man does not normally know what his heirs are going to do with what he labored to acquire; he who is bound to the heavenly wisdom in his life and deeds, will leave to them an enduring inheritance of blessing . As an example, St. John the Baptist inherited from his father Zechariah the priest and His mother Elizabeth, their unceasing holy prayers and their righteousness in the Lord; Their life supported him in the wilderness, where he was denied their seen care.

- 1- Contrary to Solomon's wisdom, possibilities, and true intention, he perverted by marrying pagan wives; the fruit of which was that his own son Rehoboam was how he was and did what he did.

- 2- According to some, Solomon's exaggeration in his huge constructions, and in his extravagant spending on his pagan wives, burdened his people with unaffordable taxes, which led to the division of the kingdom.
- 3- But they might have forgotten how Solomon's policy gave the country 40 years of peace and prosperity for all.
- 4- That shortcoming was mutual; for, on one aspect, the people who grumbled, forgot the blessings of Solomon's reign; and on another aspect, Rehoboam has put on his father's crown, but not his prudence and wisdom; nor enjoyed the spirit of true care of his grandfather David. Rehoboam did not imitate the wisdom and humility of the righteous 'Job', who recognized the right of his servants to complain against him (Job 31: 13). The people were in need to hear gentle and appeasing words from Rehoboam, to become his servants forever (7). The nice words will not cost us more than a little self- denial; and by them we would acquire uncountable blessings.

All Israel assembled in Shechem to make Rehoboam king. Shechem is 40 miles north of Jerusalem, in a location convenient for such an important assembly; within the domain of Manasseh, a cause for those dwelling in the north to rejoice. In Shechem there is the tomb of Joseph (Joshua 24: 34); In it, Abraham was a father of all Jews (Genesis 12: 6); so was Jacob (Genesis 33: 18); and in it Joshua, together with all the tribes of Israel renewed the covenant with God (Joshua 24). Choosing Shechem for the assembly therefore, bore the possibility of planting the spirit of unity between the north and the south; but, unfortunately Rehoboam's foolishness led to a serious division of the kingdom. It was good to hold the assembly in Shechem, but we hear nothing in it about renewing the covenant with God, the way it happened when Saul became king, and so it was with David (2 Samuel 2: 4), and Solomon (1 Kings 1: 28 etc.).. We can surely say that when Rehoboam received the throne, God was not in his heart, and he did not feel that he has got the kingdom from His hand..

2- THE EXTREMISM OF THE DISSENTERS:

“So it happened when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard it (he was in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of Solomon the king), that Jeroboam returned from Egypt” (2)

“Then they sent for him and called him. And Jeroboam and all Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying:” (3)

“Your father made our yoke heavy, now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father and the heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you” (4)

The people moaned because of the heavy yoke put over them by Solomon, who did not bear the spirit of his father David, who truly loved his people, and delivered himself for their sake. Solomon did not care for his people as much as he cared for his exaggerated projects and aspirations. Rehoboam, as well, did not perceive the concept of leadership, nor was a good shepherd like his grandfather David.

Concerning the responsibilities of work, Solomon divided the state into twelve regions (1 Kings 4: 7-19), with the apparent exception of the tribe of Judah; as shown by the fact that when he appointed those responsible for work, he exempted Judah from it (1 Kings 5: 13-18). That was what the prophet Samuel warned the people ahead, when they requested a king over them like the rest of the nations; saying: *“This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you. He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots, and to be his horsemen... He will appoint captains over his thousands, and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his grounds and reap his harvest; ... and you will be his servants” (1 Samuel 8: 11-18)*

+ As a matter of fact, there are many other things that may justify us and grant us a daring with God; but the most prominent of all, is to care for our

neighbor with compassion; something that the Lord Christ demanded from Peter.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ We read about certain cases, not unique, even among kings; which prove the effect of love and compassion, and, on the contrary the harm done by pride, haughtiness, and insulting words; which may end up shaking and destroying kingdoms.

+ How frequently have the children of Israel grumbled against the prophet Moses, which he always endured. And when the Lord intended to punish them for his sake, he was ready to deliver himself even to death to save them from the divine wrath (Exodus 32: 32).

How compassionately Moses talked to his people, even when they did wrong against him. By his work, and his prophecy, he gave them comfort, and encouraged them concerning the future.. Although he often talked to God, yet, when he talked to the people, he did it gently and amiably.

+ Moses was qualified to exalt above all people, that they could not look at his face (Exodus 34: 30); but they loved him because of his compassion, more so than for the miracles done by his hands.

+ David, as well, followed the lead of Moses; Having been chosen to rule the people, he was gentle and compassionate, contrite in the spirit, always ready to show his love.

Before sitting on the throne, he delivered himself to perdition for the sake of all (1 Samuel 17: 22); and when he became a king, he put himself on equal level with the others in war, and in work. He encouraged them in

battle, judged between them, endured the reviles directed to his person, and did not revile back. By all that he was dear to everyone. ...

He appreciated bravery, even of his enemies; and believed that those who endured much in battle should be honored, as though they were his own men. He admired 'Abner', the brave leader, and one of his opponents; and when he sought peace, he did not despise him, and held a banquet on his honor (1 Kings 2: 5); and when he was treasonably killed, David genuinely mourned and lamented him.

It is not a simple matter for a king to be so humble in his works, counting himself as the least of his subjects; refraining to drink water, some have risked their life to bring it to him.

David sought from God to bring His wrath on him and his father's house, instead of on the people; saying to the destructive angel sent by God:

"Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house" (2 Samuel 24: 17).

(St. Ambrose)

- + He followed the lead of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Greatest Shepherd of shepherds, who says: *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends"* (John 15: 13) On the contrary, a shepherd, only by name, does not love his herd the way he loves himself, but he disregards them to be taken by a robber or devoured by a wolf.

(St. John El-Dargy)

"So he said to them, 'Comeback to me after three days'; and the people departed" (5)

It was good of Rehoboam to give himself time to think about how he should respond to their request with no haste; and it was good of him to seek the counsel of the wise elders; but he was wrong in not seeking the counsel of the Lord; did not raising his heart to Him with prayer and offering sacrifices.

“Then king Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, saying ‘How do you advise me to answer these people?’” (6)

“And they spoke to him, saying, ‘If you are kind to these people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be your servants forever;” (7)

The elders perceived that the people were not rebellious against the king, and that they were ready to serve him with a good heart, if he was good, and bears in his heart the spirit of true care. The hearts of the good shepherds were only preoccupied with that they serve God himself through serving their people. They counted themselves servants and not of authority. The Word of God, Himself, who came incarnate, not to be served but to serve, and to deliver himself for the sake of many (Luke 22: 24-27; Philippians 2: 1-13); trained His disciples on the work of leadership through ministering, and washing the feet of those He serves (John 13: 1-17); And sought from us; saying: *“Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave”* (Matthew 20: 26-27).

+ I wish he who is a ruler, not be haughty because of his position, lest he falls down from the beatitude of humility; but it is befitting of him to know the true humility in serving others ... I wish the great among them be like the least.

- + It is befitting of those who occupy the prominent positions, be ready to offer even the physical services, the way the Lord did when he washed the feet of His disciples; and as it is written: *“He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves”* (Luke 22: 26).

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Keep the faith and the humility in yourself; for by them you will find mercy and help, will hear divine sayings in your heart; and will be accompanied by your guardian angel in secret and in public.
- + Humility is the sign of honor of divinity; for the Incarnate Son has put it on; and told us about it through our bodies; Whoever puts it on will truly become like Him who came down from His exalted position, and covered His greatness and glory with the virtue of humility, to save the creation from being consumed by His appearance.
- + No one hates the humble, nor rebuke or despise him; he loves everybody, and everybody loves him, and desires his presence among them;; and wherever he is, they look at him like an angel of light; and honor him.
- + The humility is a hidden power, got by the perfect saints after they consummate their strife; Such a grace will not be given except to those perfect in virtue.

(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

“But he rejected the counsel which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him”
(8)

Rejecting the counsel of the elders, and seeking that of the young men, was not to get a second opinion, to compare between the two; but he rejected the counsel of the elders because it was not according to his own liking; for he did not intend to serve, but only to have authority.

It is befitting of the minister to listen both to the elders and the young; to take into consideration, to look at the old, the young, and even the children, as one family, reacting together with the spirit of love and unity, with humility before the Lord.

The fathers of the church talk to us about the need of the young for the elders; as well as of the elders for the young; as according to the apostle: *“You younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’”* (1 Peter 5: 5)

Elisha, the young man, started by serving the elder Elijah. St. Ambrose admires the mutual work between the young and the older ministers; for each of them has a role consummating the other.

+ How beautiful is the unity between the elder and the young man:

The one testifies, and the other gives comfort;

The one leads, and the other gives pleasure;

Although the Holy Book did not talk much about how old was Elisha, yet it makes it obvious that he was the junior one.

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, Barnabas took Mark together with him; and Paul took Silas (Acts 15: 36-40); Timothy (Acts 16: 13), and Titus (Titus 1: 5).

We also notice the division of labor among them: the elders lead, and gives counsel, and the young provides the active work. They are all alike in virtue, but not in years; rejoice in their unity; as Peter and John were. In the gospel we read that John was a young man, as testified by his own words; Nevertheless he was not less than the elders in his worthiness and wisdom; he bore mature and revered features, and prudence of mind.

(St. Ambrose)

“And he said to them ‘What advise do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, ‘Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?’” (9)

“Then the young men who ha grown up with him spoke to him, saying, ‘Thus you should speak to the people who had spoken to you, saying. ‘Your father made our yoke heavy,

but you make it lighter on us’ – thus you shall say to them, ‘My little finger shall be thicker than my father’s waist’” (10)

In this, Rehoboam did not give heed to the words of his wise father in the Lord, saying: *“A soft answer turns away wrath”* (Proverb 15: 1); he did not perceive the danger of the tongue, about which it is said: *There is one who speaks like the piercing of a sword; but the tongue of a wise promotes health“* (Proverb 12: 18).

“And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I shall add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I shall chastise you with scourges” (11)

His words, came so violent and cruel; Instead of lightening the yoke put by his father on the people, even with a mild word, he confirmed to them that he will add to it to make it unbearable. By that he assumed that he is only practicing his right

as a king of authority; regardless of the need and feelings of his people. He took a serious decision that was going to destroy the unity of the people, as well as his own personality.

What David, the righteous king built, is now destroyed by his grandson Rehoboam in the third generation.

The serious fault of Rehoboam was that he did not seek the counsel of God, with whom he had no personal relationship.

The **scourges** were whips with sharp metal extremities, which make their strike as painful as the sting of a scorpion.

“So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, ‘Come back to me the third day’” (12)

“Then the king answered them roughly, king Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the elders” (13)

It is befitting of the leader to confront the stir-up of his subordinates, not with violence, lest he would be adding more fuel to the fire, but to hold the steering wheel of leadership fast with tranquility, to let the tempest peacefully pass on.

“And he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, ‘My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it; my father chastised you with

whips, but I will chastise you with scourges” (14)

“So the king did not listen to the people, for the turn of affairs was from God, that the Lord might fulfill His word, which He had spoken on the tongue of Ahijah

the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat” (15)

Even though the Lord has proclaimed what will happen on the tongue of Ahijah the Shilonite (15); yet this does not justify the foolishness of Rehoboam, nor lessen his responsibility for acting with such haughtiness and arrogance; something that the Lord used to fulfill His purposes.

God often allows it to visit the evil of the fathers in their children, if they walked in the same evil ways of their fathers. When Solomon forsook the Lord, God allowed the majority of the people to forsake Rehoboam the son of Solomon. To exhort the fathers who do not care for what will dwell on themselves of troubles, God allows for them to perceive that what they do, will come back over their children more than they could imagine; which many fathers hate to see.

If God allowed it to fulfill His threats of visiting Solomon's sin in his son Rehoboam, Yet, at the same time He did not forget His promise to David; hence He kept two tribes for his grandson Rehoboam.

The Psalmist says on the tongue of the Lord: *"If they break My statutes, and do not keep My commandments, then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving kindness I will not utterly take from him; nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips"* (Psalm 89: 31- 34).

3- THEIR REJECTION OF REHOBOAM:

"Now, when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: 'What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to your tents, O Israel! Now see to your own house , O David. So all Israel departed to their tents'" (16)

Although it was Rehoboam who acted cruelly, and without wisdom, yet the ten tribes counted their rebellion, not against Rehoboam but against David, saying: *“What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse”* (16); which God counted as a rejection of His grace and promises; and Judah, in His eyes, represented His people, and Israel represented those dissented from him.

Their evil was demonstrated in the following:

- 1- The majority of the ten tribes accepted the worship of the calves.
- 2- They dismissed the priests and the Levites, and set priests for the idols
- 3- The faithful to the faith set forth to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah.

“But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah” (17)

“Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram who was in charge of the revenue, but the children of Israel stoned him with stones, and he died. Therefore king Rehoboam mounted his chariot in haste to flee to Jerusalem” (18)

The same way Rehoboam sought the wrong counsel; When he intended to correct his fault, he chose the wrong intermediary: he chose ‘Hadoram’ who was in charge of the revenue (of the forced labor), who, in the eyes of the people represented the heavy yoke put by Solomon on them. Instead of sending someone known for his wisdom and compassion, to whom they might readily listen, he sent someone whose face they would not endure to see, for being responsible for the procedure of forced labor.

“So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day” (19)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 10

TAKE IN YOUR HAND, O LORD, THE STEERING WHEEL OF MY LIFE

- + In the great Shechem, Rehoboam encountered all Israel;
He received his father's throne, with all its riches and glory;
He thought of himself as a king whose word is undisputed;
He did not surrender to You, O Lord, the steering wheel;
Nor renewed the covenant with You, and with Your people.

- + He assumed that the whole people are his slaves;
He did not imitate You, O King of kings, and the good Shepherd;
He did not imitate his grandfather David, in the purity of his heart,
Nor hid himself in You, for You to work in and by him.

- + The people longed to see him truly a grandson of David;
They sought from him to lift the heavy yoke put on them by his father
Solomon;
They did not refuse to serve him;
They just asked him to be compassionate toward them, to serve him
faithfully.

- + Rehoboam did know how to ask the Lord's counsel;
God was not the leader of his life and mind
He sought the counsel of both the elders and the young men;
But he accepted the counsel that was according to his own heart;
In pride and foolishness;
Violence found a place in his heart and mind;

- + Receive, O Lord, my steering wheel;
Let me walk according to Your Spirit, O wholly loving and compassionate.
Oh, how much I long to give for the sake of your people;
And how much I find pleasure to serve all;

- + Uproot from my heart all cruelty;
And from my mouth every reviling word;
To become truly Your ambassador.

- + Through violence, the people lost their unity;
And controversy and dissension entered between them;
Grant me love and compassion;
That all would assemble together for You;
I wish You would be the leader of Your people;
I wish that, by the spirit of unity, all would set forth from power to power;
I wish all would experience the true glory;
I wish all would walk in an enjoyable journey in Your company;
I wish all would set forth as though to Your heavens;
Glory be to You, O true Leader, and Good Shepherd



CHAPTER 11

THE FAILING ATTEMPTS OF REHOBOAM

The stories concerning the prophets of the North are prominent and full of life; like those of Micah, Elijah, and Elisha. According to some, the ministry of the prophets was concentrated in the Northern kingdom up to the eighth century BC. But here, we hear about Shemaiah the man of God who carried a message to Rehoboam to refrain from fighting his brethren of the Northern kingdom. That was the first indication of the existence of prophetic ministry in the Southern kingdom at that time. The second book of the chronicles came to tell us much about the prophets of the South, including Azariah the son of Oded (15: 1-7); Hanani the seer (16: 7-9); Jehu the son of Hanani (19: 2-3); Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (24: 20-22); and a prophet not known by name, sent by God to King Amasiah (25: 7-9); And according to the book of the chronicles, Elijah the prophet was sent a message to the Southern kingdom to king Jehoram king of Judah (21: 12-16).

- 1- An attempt by Rehoboam to bring the dissented ten tribes back to the kingdom
1 - 4
- 2- An attempt by Rehoboam to keep the remaining two tribes for himself
5 - 12
- 3- The return of the priests and the Levites to Jerusalem
13 - 17
- 4- Rehoboam's wives and children
18 - 23

1- AN ATTEMPT TO BRING THE DISSENTED TEN TRIBES BACK TO THE KINGDOM:

“Now when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled from the house of Judah and Benjamin one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men, who were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam” (1)

Rehoboam most probably, assembled the warriors according to the counsel of the same young men who provoked him to respond violently to the people who came to him, and consequently lost the ten tribes by his violent words.

The reasons that, according to Rehoboam, justified his intention to fight against Jeroboam and the ten tribes were:

1- He considered those tribes as rebels against his kingdom, and therefore should be chastised

2- As the legitimate king from the house of David, he was committed to confirm his authority and his military might, to get the twelve tribes of Israel together.

3- By that he would fulfill the desire of his wise father, the wisest person on earth at that time, who sought killing Jeroboam, for he raised his hand against him (1 Kings 11: 26, 40). Jeroboam

fled to Egypt, and remained there until Solomon died.

4- The ten tribes killed Hadoram , whom Rehoboam sent for reconciliation; and according to him, they killed an innocent man of peace (2 Chronicles 10: 18). If David declared war against the

Emmonites for insulting his messengers (2 Samuel 10: 7); Jeroboam killed Rehoboam’s messenger with no justification. He, therefore should be chastised, together with the ten tribes.

“But the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying: (2)

Rehoboam's repeated fault was not resorting to the Lord and seeking His counsel before doing anything; for which God let him consummate what was on his mind, to assemble one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men to fight against the ten tribes. Then he sent to him Shemaiah the man of God to reveal to him that he wasted his time and effort in assembling that huge army; and now, he is committed to let them return to their houses.

It was befitting of Rehoboam to seek the Lord's counsel in everything, like his grandfather David, the majority of whose psalms came to confirm his trust in the Lord's counsel, might, and care for him (2 Samuel 2: 1). He used to ask God in everything big and small, trusting that he would lead him to victory, and grant him prosperity in everything.

“ *“Deliver me from my enemies, O my God”* (Psalm 59: 1).

I once fled from you; Now I flee toward You;

Adam fled before the face of God, and hid between the trees of paradise; and about him in the book of 'Job' it was said: *“Like a servant escaping from his master, earnestly desire the shade”* (Job 7: 2 LXX).

Woe to me if I remained underneath that shade, about which it was said: *“All things have vanished like a shadow”* (Wisdom 5: 9).

Fight against the evil princes of this world, of the darkness (the devil and his hosts)

Great is your strife; although you do not see your enemies, yet you prevailed against them.

(St. Augustine)

- + *"In Your mercy cut off my enemies"*. Not that I am worthy of it, but for the sake of Your mercy, *"destroy those who afflict my soul"* (Psalm 143: 12), for I am Your servant.

Notice again how the request is well received. It is not easy to get what we ask, but we are committed to make ourselves worthy of it; and to contribute on our side with what we should.

The bare prayer is not naturally enough in itself. The Jews prayed, and the response was: *"Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear"* (Isaiah 1: 15). Why would you marvel, if Ezekiel's prayer was not heard; but was told by God: *"Though those three men: Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it (in the land), they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness, says the Lord"* (Ezekiel; 14: 14)

You should perceive that together with praying, we have to make ourselves worthy of getting the present and future blessings.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Whoever resorts to God, will be saved by God from his enemies, hidden and manifest.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

"Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying" (3)

"Thus says the Lord, 'You shall not go up or fight against your brethren! Let every man return to his house, for the thing is from Me'. Therefore, they

obeyed the words of the Lord and turned back from attacking Jeroboam" (4)

Rejecting David, God counted that they have rejected Him personally. They deprived themselves of the right to be counted as the people of God; and consequently, not a single good king came out of them.

Rehoboam put in his heart to regain the unity of the people by force, but God did not let him enter into battle against the rest of the tribes; and he actually obeyed the divine command.

Why has God not allowed Rehoboam to fight against Jeroboam?

- 1- To punish Solomon for idol worship
- 2- To chastise Rehoboam for not seeking the counsel of God before responding to Jeroboam and those with him.
- 3- For God separated between the sheep and the goats, to keep Israel from leading Judah astray. If the people were divided into two kingdoms: ten tribes under “the kingdom of Israel”, and two tribes under “the kingdom of Judah”; the book of the chronicles that cares for the temple and worship almost counts the kingdom of Israel, namely the Northern kingdom, dissented from the house of David, as not existing; and only recognizes the king of Judah as the sole king of all Israel. But the book however counts the people of the dissented kingdom, as brethren of those of Judah and Benjamin, against whom they should not fight; as they are still the children of God, for whom He seeks salvation and not perdition.
- 4- To confirm to them that the power is not in being united with Israel, as much as it is in resorting to the Lord.
- 5- Saying: “*You shall not go up or fight against your brethren*”, because it is not befitting of the brethren under any circumstances to fight each others. When there was controversy between Abraham and Lot (Genesis 12), Abraham drew his nephew’s attention to the fact that being brethren, they ought not to battle one another (Genesis 13: 8). Refusing to kill Saul who made several attempts to kill David, God rewarded the latter by giving him the throne, establishing it; and from his seed the Messiah the Savior of mankind will

come; And allowed for an intimate friendship to develop between the two tribes Judah and Benjamin, after the death of David and Saul, and the two together became one kingdom, for several centuries to follow (Genesis 27: 41-46; Psalm 137). On the contrary, the controversy between Jacob and Esau, endured all along their life.

It is befitting of the believer in his longing for the salvation of all, not to do it with blind bigotry, but with love through a feeling of brotherhood, of a perception of the love of the Holy God. who delivered His only begotten Son for the sake of every man; and also of love of his fellow man. The believer desires to bind with all men whom he knows and whom he does not know; to bind with the contemporaries, the departed, and those who will come after him; to bind with them in a union of true love; in a spiritual kinship that exalts above every physical or blood bond; to bind with them in the Head "Jesus Christ"; that all would be partners in everything forever; particularly in holiness by the Holy God.

+ I wish we, who are qualified to such sacraments, lead a life that befits the gift; namely to show an exalted behavior..... Being a father, a son, a brother, or any other relationship, is not counted as true kinsman, as much as if the relationship is on a higher level. For what would be the benefit of earthly familial relationship without spiritual bond?!... What would be the benefit if we are kinsmen on earth and strangers in heaven?!.... The catechumen is a stranger to the believer; not spiritually having the same Head, nor the same Father, the same city, the same food, drink, clothes, table, or house. ... The catechumen is preoccupied with regular, earthly things, whereas the believer seeks them as heavenly things

One will have Christ as King; while the other will have the food that will eventually corrupt.

One will have clothes that will eventually rot or eaten by bugs; while the other will have the Lord of the angels.

One will have his city in heaven; while the other will have it on earth.

Even if we are twins born from one and the same womb; that will not be enough to set a perfect kinship.

If we have nothing in common, where will then, be the fellowship?

Let us then strive to become citizens of the high up city/

The positive response by Rehoboam to the words of the Lord on the tongue of Shemaiah the man of God, might be because he feared failure, on account of that he was not experienced in war like David his grandfather; but like his father Solomon. However, after building strongholds, and confirming his military might, he entered into several battles against Jeroboam.

On another aspect, he remained faithful in his worship to the Lord for three years, after which he perverted to idol worship.

2- REHOBOAM'S ATTEMPTS TO KEEP THE TWO TRIBES:

: *“So Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defense in Judah” (5)*

The division of the kingdom has no doubt shaken the image of Israel before the nations and peoples; yet Rehoboam did not care for the scoffing nations, but concentrated on fortifying the borders of his kingdom and the main cities in his kingdom. In the days of peace In the era of Solomon, there was no need for fortifying the cities, his only concern was construction, production, and commerce.

“And he built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekua” (6)

He fortified Bethlehem, ten kilometers from Jerusalem, famed for being the place of birth of David, and of the Son of David, the Lord of glory Jesus Christ.

The recent excavations confirm the existence of remains of those fortified cities.

Rehoboam cared for building strongholds in the East, the West, and the South; leaving the North open for the following reasons:

- 1- Knowing that Jeroboam was on good terms with Egypt, where he found refuge when Solomon sought to kill him, Rehoboam feared that Egypt would eventually attack him from the South, as a show of alliance with Jeroboam,
- 2- Leaving the North open, was to welcome the priests and the Levites who were persecuted in the Northern kingdom and replaced by the priests of the idols; Some godly men among the people who refused idol worship returned to Jerusalem as well to enjoy the worship of the living God. Rehoboam had hope that the common people will eventually long to go to Jerusalem to enjoy worship, particularly in the feasts.

“Beth Zur, Sochoh, Adullam” (7)

“Gath, Mareshah, Ziph” (8)

“Gath”, was a city taken by the Jews from the Philistines in the days of Samuel and king David (1 Samuel 7: 14; 1 chronicles 18: 1)

“Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah” (9)

“Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah and Benjamin, fortified cities” (10)

“Hebron”, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwelt, and were buried, together with Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah. It was one of the cities of the priests, and a city of refuge, and in it David reigned for seven years.

“And he fortified the strongholds, and put captains to them, and stores of food, oil, and wine” (11)

“Also in every city he put shields and spears, and made them very strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side” (12)

In the South, Rehoboam built fortified cities to confront any probable attack from Egypt (5-12).. Yet, those fortified cities in the south and west did not keep the invaders away; for, *“Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain”* (Psalm 127: 1)

3- THE RETURN OF THE PRIESTS AND THE LEVITES:

The ten tribes have opposed God by appointing priests and offering sacrifices on the high places for the goats, and the calf idols (11: 15), that made the priests and the Levites of the living God desert the Northern kingdom and set forth to Jerusalem and Judah (11: 14).

“And from all the territories, the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel took stand with him” (13)

“For the Levites left their common lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons rejected them from serving as priests to the Lord” (14)

“Then he appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the demons, and the calf idols which he had made” (15)

In the book of the kings there is a mention of the calf worship; and here, there is a reference to another kind of idol worship, by those who believed that demons take the form of goats and live among the ruins. The primitive peoples used to worship what they fear; and here unfortunately we find the people of God imitate those peoples and worship what they fear.

Having rejected the worship of the living God, and set for himself priests for the high places, for the goats, and the calf idols which he had made, Jeroboam , for fear that the people might long to return to Jerusalem to worship in the temple, he allowed the priests and the Levites to return to Jerusalem.. Leaving behind their common lands

and their possessions, Rehoboam was strengthened by their return, together with the godly men of Israel.

No wonder that he, who rejected the living God would reject His minister as well, and longs to get rid of them.

At the same time, it was for the benefit of those priests and Levites to forsake the Northern kingdom and set forth to the kingdom of Judah, where there are the temple and the altar of the Lord, and to rid themselves of the troubles and afflictions directed against them by the priests of the high places.

Forsaking their common lands, fields, and possessions, we would undoubtedly say that Rehoboam and his people welcomed those who defected from the North, and did not feel that they might present a burden upon their kingdom. They have fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah later said: *“Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in”* (Isaiah 26: 2).

“And after the Levites left, those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the lord God of their fathers” (16)

Once the priests and the Levites set forth to Jerusalem, they were followed by some of the godly and righteous men, who set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel; those who, likewise, forsook the inheritance of their fathers, to go to Judah, to have the complete freedom to go to the altar of the Lord, and to keep away,, together with their children, from any seduction to worship the calves.

Those godly men present to us a beautiful example:

- 1- They cared for the salvation of their souls and those of their children, and gave priority to the worship of God, before any other benefit, whether material, comfort, or temporal happiness.

- 2- They got attached to the faithful priests of God, according to what came in the book of Joshua: *“When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests and the Levites bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it”* (Joshua 3: 3)

“So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for three years, because they walked in the way of

David and Solomon for three years” (17)

The kingdom of Judah was strengthened, not only through the increase in number of inhabitants, nor through what they brought with them of their personal possessions, but through the blessing of the Lord that dwelt upon the kingdom by their godliness, prayers, and their attachment to the Lord.

4- REHOBOAM’S WIVES AND CHILDREN:

“Then Rehoboam took for himself as wife, Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David, and of Abihail the daughter of Eliah the son of Jesse” (18)

Plunging in his pleasures, Rehoboam sought many women, the way his father did, yet, he was wiser than his father, in that he did not take for himself pagan wives. One of them was a descendent of Eliab a brother of David (18), and another a descendant of Absalom the son of David (20), and a third of Jermoth the son of David.(18).(There is no prior mention of the name of Jermoth among the son of David, he probably was the son of a concubine).

“And she (Mahalath) bore him children: Jeush, Shamariah, and Zaham” (19)

After her he took Maacah the granddaughter of Absalom, and she bore him Abijah, Attai, Zizah, , and Shilomith” (20)

Like his father Solomon, Rehoboam had many wives and concubines, but the book did not mention any other likeness.

Of the sons of Solomon, only Rehoboam was mentioned, the rest were not worthy of even mentioning their number. Whereas the children of Rehoboam, were twenty eight sons and sixty daughters.

“Now Rehoboam loved Maacah more than all his wives and his concubines, for he took eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and begot twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters” (21)

“And Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maacah as chief, to be leader among his brothers; for he intended to make him king” (22)

“He dealt wisely, and dispersed some of his sons throughout all the territories of Judah and Benjamin, to every fortified city; and he gave them provisions in abundance. He also sought many wives for them” (23)

According to some, Rehoboam acted wisely when he distributed the lands of Judah and Benjamin among his sons, to avoid any probability that any of them would plot against Abijah (whom he appointed a leader among his brothers, and intended to make him king), the way Adonijah and Absalom did against their brother Solomon, and a further division would happen in the kingdom.. On another aspect, by sending them to dwell in all cities, they would take care of the people everywhere, and of the cities which he fortified and gave provisions in abundance, and would support their brother in case of a foreign invasion; or of a local revolution in the land against their brother

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 11

HOW GREAT IS YOUR LOVE, O HOLY ONE

- + How great is Your love, and how great is Your deeds, O my Savior!
For the sake of the salvation of the world, You chose the righteous Abraham;
You promised to make him father of many nations;
And You chose Isaac his son and Jacob his grandson;
From his descendants, You set a people for Yourself, not out of partiality;
But to come incarnate of his seed;
And to deliver Yourself a redemption for all mankind.

- + Israel perverted and rebelled against You, O Holy One;
Out of the twelve tribes, You set aside two tribes: Judah and Benjamin;
Of them You set the kingdom of Judah, with the hope that they would walk in
love and holiness;
You did not allow them to fight against the ten rebellious tribes;
Because You seek the brotherly love together with holiness.

- + Many have perverted, even among the two tribes;
But You kept a few remnant holy;
By an amazing ordinance You kept in every generation a few remnant holy for
Yourself;
Out of those few remnants, You incarnated from St. Mary to redeem us;
You seek that humanity would be sanctified and on them love would prevail;
How amazing is Your Love, O Holy One!

- + Grant Your church to unite with you forever;
To walk in You, to be filled with love and holiness;
To become an icon of You, and to be qualified for the heavenly wedding;

To give pleasure to the Holy Father;
And to become wonder among the heavenly hosts;
Give me a pure heart, filled with love and holiness.



CHAPTER 12

THE SORROWFUL DECLINE OF REHOBOAM

Having established his kingdom, Rehoboam, together with his people forsook the law of the lord, which no doubt shocked the priests, the Levites and the godly men who came to Jerusalem from the Northern kingdom because of the same reason.

After five years of Rehoboam's reign, Shishak king of Egypt, founder of the twenty-second dynasty of the kings of Egypt, came to Jerusalem and plundered from the holy land everything of value, whether in the temple or in the king's house.

This chapter presents to us some details about Rehoboam's life more than what came in the books of the kings, but unfortunately, a sorrowful history; which seems as though we went back to the era of the judges.

1- Rehoboam and his people do evil	1
2- God delivered them into the hands of Shishak king of Egypt	2 - 4
3- The prophet Shemaiah's call to repentance	5
4- The repentance of the king and the leaders	6
5- God recedes His wrath	7 - 12
6- The personality of Rehoboam	13 – 16

1- REHOBOAM AND HIS PEOPLE DO EVIL:

“Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel along with him” (1)

Man often disregards trusting in God once he get satisfied and strong; and instead of praising God for His gifts, he becomes more preoccupied with the gift than with the Giver of the gift.

For as long as three years, Rehoboam and his people walked in the way of the Lord; and the kingdom was strong despite the separation of ten tribes. But, unfortunately, Rehoboam was only preoccupied with establishing his kingdom and not with having an intimate relationship with God. He no more feared Egypt, he trusted in his fortified cities and forsook the Lord.

“And all Israel”, here he means the kingdom of Judah with its two tribes, together with the priests and the Levites and the godly people who came from the kingdom of Israel. He did not say “the kingdom of Judah”, but “Israel”; for he does not consider the northern kingdom as “Israel”, even though it so called itself, and so called by the surrounding nations; on account of that it walked in the way of evil following the lead of Jeroboam. He calls the kingdom of Judah “Israel”; even though in its turn they eventually forsook the Lord like the northern kingdom.

That shows the seriousness of leadership; For once Rehoboam perverted, all the people followed lead.

When Rehoboam was shaken because of the division of the kingdom, he resorted to God. But when his kingdom got stronger, he trusted in his own power and possibilities, and forsook the way of the Lord. That is what the Lord warns us against. When man is satisfied, feels secure, and enjoys many blessings, he forgets His Creator and denies his Shepherd, instead of giving thanks to Him. The Lord

says: *“When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers; and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat; then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant”* (Deuteronomy 31: 20). And, *“But Jeshurun (namely the beloved) grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick; you are covered with fat; then he forsook God who made him, the Rock of his salvation”* (Deuteronomy 32: 15). He likens the beloved Israel to a horse that, when it ate, grew thick and fat, it started kicking the One who created him, and foolishly despised God the Rock of his salvation. God presented to them an abundance of His goods; and instead of offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving to Him, they raised their feet to kick God Himself; and when He rebukes them through His prophets, they are stirred up like a wild cow and a bull not used to carry a yoke. By their pride they do not endure a word of rebuke, even it comes from God their Creator Himself.

It is said: *“they grew thick, they grew fat”*; Namely they have gone to extreme in doing evil; *“they surpass the deeds of the wicked; they do not plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless; yet they prosper, and the right of the needy they do not defend”* (Jeremiah 6: 28). In other words they assumed that they have become great with authority, so rich to need nothing more, fat and filled with good health and beauty; not perceiving that they have actually acquired and gathered for themselves great evil; for all these things will eventually come to an end, and the heart will remain corrupt with evil.

+ While sorrow may draw mercy, and may bring compassion on us; riches, on the other hand will lead us to foolish pride, to slothfulness and haughtiness; hence the psalmist says, *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes”* (Psalm 119: 71); and, *“The Lord is known by the judgments He executes”* (Psalm 9: 16).

(St. John

Chrysostom)

1- GOD DELIVERED THEM INTO THE HANDS OF SHISHAK KING OF EGYPT:

“And it happened, in the fifth year of king Rehoboam that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the Lord” (2)

In the fourth year they forsook the Lord, and in the fifth year God allowed Shishak king of Egypt to come up against the kingdom of Judah, to take the fortified cities, and to come to Jerusalem, intending to wake them up, and to provoke them to repentance before their hearts turn to stone.

The affliction dwelt from an unexpected source; for, although their relationship with Egypt was good, yet the king of Egypt came with a great power to take over the fortified cities, in which Rehoboam trusted for the security of his kingdom.

According to Rabbi Sol. Jarchi, that Shishak was ‘Necho’ Pharaoh of Egypt, who came to confiscate the ivory throne which his son-in-law Solomon made for himself, which he, for long, wanted for himself, and finally did. He robbed as well, and with no resistance, the temple and the royal palace of everything of value; particularly that Rehoboam did not care much for the temple.

According to apparent human view, Shishak attacked the kingdom of Judah, as a kind of support to Jeroboam who has taken refuge in Egypt, and to show off the might of Egypt; But, according to God’s plan, it was intended to chastise Rehoboam and his people for forsaking the Lord.

“With twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and people without number who came with him out of Egypt – the Lubim and Sukkiim and the Ethiopians” (3)

The “Lubim”, namely the people of Lybia. The “Sukkiims”, most probably were Egyptians who inhabited west of the Red Sea. In the Septuagint version, they came as the dwellers of caves (Troglodytes), and according to some their name is derived from the word ‘Cykiyim’ or ‘Caacak’, meaning (covered), as they were as though covered underground.

“And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came to Jerusalem” (4)

God allows for the chastisement of the leader as well as of the people (12: 2-4). We should not marvel that God who had previously saved them from the bondage of the Pharaoh of Egypt on the hand of the prophet Moses; Now, as his people in Judah perverted, He did not deliver them to be chastised by the hands of their brethren Israel, but delivered them to be chastised by the evil world. The heart of God is preoccupied by the salvation of those who believe in Him, not with their temporal enjoyment, nor their temporary honor in the world.

2- SHEMAIAH CALLS THEM TO REPENTANCE:

“Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah who were gathered together in Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak’” (5)

The leaders of Judah assembled in Jerusalem with the king, as a military council, to investigate the situation in that critical time. There, God sent His prophet to tell them the true cause of their fall. It was the same prophet who was previously sent by the Lord to keep them from fighting against their brethren of the ten tribes of Israel (11: 2). He came to confirm to them that what dwelt upon them is not the result of any

weakness in their military preparations, but is allowed by God to chastise them for they have forsaken Him..

4- THE REPENTANCE OF THE KING AND THE LEADERS:

“So the leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves, and said, ‘The Lord is righteous’” (6)

Shemaiah’s mission gave fruit by the repentance of the king and the leaders of Israel, who humbled themselves before the Lord, and confessed that their perversion is the cause of their defeat; saying: *“The Lord is righteous”*, namely we should not put the blame on the Lord, but on ourselves. As a result of their repentance, God, even though He stopped any further aggression by Shishak, yet He allowed him to take his people as his slaves. He intended for them to experience the difference between worshipping God, the Grantor of freedom and happiness, and falling under bondage to the pagan king that would destroy their souls.

3- GOD RECEDES HIS WRATH:

“Now when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, ‘They have humbled themselves, therefore

I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak’” (7)

When the Lord saw that the king and the leaders humbled themselves, He did not allow for their destruction, but for their chastisement. Everything done by Solomon to build a beautiful temple for the Lord, was corrupted by Rehoboam his son; for Shishak king of Egypt took away all its decorations and treasures, and corrupted its past glories.

And even though God did not allow for the utter destruction of Jerusalem (7, 12), yet He let them go through affliction for some time; on account of that their repentance was not complete.

Although it was said: "*Things also went well in Judah*" (12); Namely that, in Judah, there were some good ministers, good people, and good families, who responded to the call of the prophet, and perceived the cause of all those calamities that dwelt upon the land; about which the psalmist said: "*The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death*" (Psalm 118: 18).

- + In this the psalmist perceives the great grace and benefit of the temptations that would make man in a better condition. God, being the Father who cares for us, and not the Avenger against us, He delivers us to temptations, to chasten us, to let us have prudence, and perseverance, and eventually to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

- + The way a father, a teacher, a prince, or a judge, teach us to fear; a physical ailment may do likewise, it may let you have your prudence back. Moreover the bitter difficulties that dwell, even on others, may, as well be of benefit; For although we may not feel their bitter impact, yet seeing how the others are chastened, we may get back to more reason.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The chastisement (or the rebuke) is a sign of loving care, that will lead to more understanding..

The divine Teacher demonstrates that by saying to Jerusalem: "*How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing*" (Matthew 23: 37); And the Holy Book also says: "*They committed adultery with stones and trees*" (Jeremiah 3: 9), and

offered burnt offerings to the Baal. This is a great proof of His love; for even though He is aware of the disgrace of those who have rejected Him, and that they have gone astray from Him, yet He attempts to exhort them to repent, and He says to His prophet Ezekiel: *“And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, ... You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear, or whether they refuse”* (Ezekiel 2: 6). And He says to Moses: *“Go and tell Pharaoh: Thus says the Lord God of Israel: let my people go (Exodus 5: 1). But I know that he will not release them.”* Here, two things are apparent: His divinity, which is obvious in His prior knowledge of what will take place; and His love, by giving the chance to them to choose the repentance for themselves.

Concerning God’s care for His people, He rebuked them in Isaiah, saying: *“In as much as these people draw near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me”* (Isaiah 29: 13); And He also says: *“In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matthew 15: 9). Here, His loving care shows their sins and the salvation side by side’

- + *“For whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son He receives”* (Hebrew 12: 6); Yet , it is also written: *“The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death”* (Psalm 118: 18).

(St. Ambrose)

- + Whoever readily receives the chastening of the Lord, will benefit from it, will reform himself, and will not be given over to death that dwells upon those persistent on doing wrong. That is why the Lord allows for His own to fall into afflictions, to let them benefit from them the cure from the death of sin; as according to the apostle: *“For whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son He receives”* (Hebrew 12: 6).And: *“What son is there whom a father does not chasten?”* (Hebrew 12: 7)

(Father

Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- + You should notice how ‘Job’ responded to every calamity that dwelt upon him, by blessing the Lord. By such a response, shame and disgrace will come upon the enemy who would consider this response as a punishment and a defeat on him; on account of that he himself was created in blessing, yet he rebelled against the Lord; while that mortal man ‘Job’ utters the praise of glory, even while under chastisement.

By words of perseverance, ‘Job’ praised God when he was stricken, by which he aimed many arrows to the chest of his adversary, and caused him wounds more bitter than those by which he himself was inflicted; For, in his anguish, ‘Job’ might have lost earthly things, yet by his perseverance and humility he doubled his heavenly blessings,

(Pope Gregory the Great)

“Nevertheless they will be his servants, that they may distinguish My service from the service of the kingdoms of the nations”
(8)

If God, for the sake of them humbling themselves, did not allow for the destruction of Jerusalem, and for cutting off the house of David; Yet He allowed for them to fall into bondage to serve the king of Egypt, to let them taste the bitterness of sin. ... Having forsaken the Lord, the Liberator of souls from the bondage of the devil, He allowed for them to become slaves under the mercy of the king of Egypt, to pay heavy taxes to him; and to make them perceive that the Lord's commandments are not as heavy as forsaking Him. Having rejected submission to the Lord and His service, they came to serve their enemies in hunger, thirst, shame, and reproach. By that, every soul would return to God, being her first Man, whom she deserted to walk in corruption; as it came in the book of Hosea: *“Then she will say: I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better for me than now”* (Hosea 2: 7)..... They rejected the statutes of God, that grant joy, to fall under the terrible statutes of Shishak king of Egypt, ... The Lord's commandment may seem as a deprivation of pleasures, and a loss of the joy of the temporal life; but forsaking it is a bondage with the devil, love of the world, and of the pleasures of the body.

*“So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house;
he took everything. He also carried away the gold shields which Solomon had made”* (9)

Being the symbol of the devil. The king of Egypt took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, that Solomon left full. What David and Solomon collected through their attachment to the Lord, Rehoboam lost by forsaking Him.

“In their place king Rehoboam made bronze shields and committed them to the hands of the captains of the guard. , who guarded the entrance of the king's house” (10)

Conditions have declined from Solomon to Rehoboam; from a golden era to one of humiliation; in one generation, and in a bitter way that never happened before.... even though it happened several times in later eras; and ended up in that Jerusalem has fallen into captivity.

According to the historian Josephus: Rehoboam was a foolish arrogant man.

The loss of the golden shields and the use of bronze shields instead, refers to the work of sin in our life; turning what is heavenly within our hands to what is earthly.

“And whenever the king entered the house of the Lord, the guard would go and bring them out, then they would take them back into the guardroom” (11)

“When he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely; and things also went well in Judah” (12)

Yet, despite the serious faults of Rehoboam, it was said: *“Things also went well in Judah” (12: 12).*

4- THE PERSONALITY OF REHOBOAM:

“So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem and reigned. Now Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king, and he

reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. His mother’s

name was Naamah, an Ammonitess” (13)

“And he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord” (14)

“The acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies?

And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days” (15)

Rehoboam was not consistent in his relationship with the Lord; Not rejecting the worship of the living God altogether, yet he did evil by not preparing his heart to seek the Lord. He most probably falter between his wish to worship the Lord, and to enjoy the temporal pleasures.

“So rehoam rested with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. Then Abijah his son reigned in his place” (16)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 12

BY YOUR LOVE, O LORD, YOU CHASTISE TO SAVE

+ Rehoboam fortified his cities and established his kingdom;

He felt secure, and was proud of his abilities and possibilities;
Seeing Your commandments as deprivation, he forsook them;
He provoked his people to rebel and to forsake You as well.

+ Shishak king of Egypt assumed that he moves by his own wisdom;
He invaded the kingdom of Judah to please his friend Jeroboam;
And to proclaim his might and greatness among the surrounding nations;
He did not perceive that it is God who allows him to act, to chasten
Rehoboam.

+ God allowed him to conquer, yet within limits;
To chasten Rehoboam and his people;
But not for their perdition, but to chasten them to return to Him;
God allows to chasten us, even by the hands of the wicked;
But He will never give us over to death;
He is like a father who wants his children to return to him;
He is like a physician who holds the knife to heel but not to kill;
His chastisements shine with love and hidden care;
It is good for me that You have chasten me;
For in the midst of my bitterness, Your comfort give me pleasure.

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CHAPTER 13

KING ABIJAH SON OF REHOBOAM

This chapter parades the life of king Abijah son of Rehoboam in more detail than what came in the book of the kings, where it is said that he was no better than his father (1 kings 5: 2-3); But here we see him of more courage, and success in war

Although Abijah sat on the throne only for three years, yet his biography came here in a complete chapter; (but nothing equivalent in the book of the kings). He entered into war against Jeroboam son of Nebat that ended with killing about half a million of the warriors of the Northern kingdom.

1- Abijah, king of Judah	1
2- Abijah assembles his army against Jeroboam	2 - 3
3- Abijah's speech addressed to Jeroboam and his people	4 - 12
4- Israel defeated before Judah	13 - 20
5- The end of Abijah's life	21 – 22

1- ABIJAH, KING OF JUDAH: .

“In the eighteenth year of king Rehoboam, Abijah became king over Judah” (1)

2- ABIJAH ASSEMBLES HIS ARMY AGAINST JEROBOAM:

“He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name is Michaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam” (2)

In (2 Chronicles 11: 20), it was said that his mother was 'Maacah daughter of Absalom; while here, it is said that her name was Michaiah daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. Most probably she was a granddaughter of Absalom from his daughter

Tamar (2 Samuel 14: 27). In the book of the kings, God mentions the name of the mother, on account of that she bears a part of the responsibility for her son; to have credit if he walks according to God's commandments, ; and bear the reproach if otherwise.

“Abijah set the battle in order with an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand of choice men. Jeroboam also drew up in battle formation against him with eight hundred thousand choice men, mighty men of valor” (3)

Abijah set his army of 400,000 of choice men against that of Jeroboam of 800,000, namely double as many men of valor/ God helped Judah because of Abijah's testimony to God. Abijah sat down first with himself and counted the cost, adding to his army his faith and trust in God; by which he prevailed over Jeroboam. As in the gospel of Luke we hear the Lord Christ say: *“What king, going to make war against another king does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand”* (Luke 14: 31)

Abijah made the following list of the cost of his war against Jeroboam:

- 1- God's covenant with Judah through David, is an unchangeable eternal covenant.
- 2- The rebellion of the ten tribes through their king Jeroboam against the house of David, God's anointed (6-7)
- 3- The perversion of the ten tribes to idol-worship, and their trust in false gods (8)
- 4- They sent the priests of the Lord away, and appointed others according to their will.
- 5- Judah trust in God, being their Head, on whose Word they depend (the trumpets of the priests).

Based upon this list of costs, Abijah hid himself in God, and counted that the battle concerns God personally; Whereas Jeroboam trusted in the size of his army. Abijah, consequently prevailed, and got back the cities of Bethel, Jeshaniah, and Ephraim.

3- ABIJAH GIVES A SPEECH TO JEROBOAM AND HIS PEOPLE:

“Then Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, and said, ‘Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel”

(4)

Some call the speech of Abijah on Mount Zemaraim “Abijah’s sermon on the mount”; in which the king revealed how the sound decision could be reached: whether an individual or a congregation take God as Head and Leader, or take him as an enemy to fight against (12)

Abijah’s battle came as a practical demonstration, for an individual or a congregation, either of the attachment to the Lord, the Grantor of conquest, or of opposing Him, to end up with defeat and failure.

Abijah had the courage to address Jeroboam and 800,000 warriors with him, using Mount Zepharaim as his podium. Zepharaim was one of the cities of Judah (Jeshua 18: 22) on the border between Judah and Israel.

“Should you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons by a covenant of salt?” (5)

According to St. Augustine, the division of the kingdom of Israel was based, not on a religious foundation, but on a political one; contrary to what came in Abijah's speech that it was based on a religious foundation.

Abijah stood to confirm to the ten tribes that the battle is not between the two kingdom, about who will reign, as God Himself already made the decision, and gave a divine promise to give the throne to the house of David; What Jeroboam did, therefore is a disobedience of the divine command..

Intending to convince the children of Israel by reason and not by the sword, Abijah went to them in their land, and addressed them from Mount Zepharaim, for Jeroboam and his men to hear him; with the hope of making a reconciliation treaty between them, pending their approval. The kings or the leaders used to make a speech to their forces before they enter into the battle, to stir up in them the spirit of zeal and courage. But abijah addressed his speech, not to his own troops, but to Jeroboam and all the people of the Northern kingdom, concentrating it upon the fact the divine right is on his side, because God Himself is on his side. In it Abijah confirmed that God gave the throne on all Israel to the house of David, not on a temporary basis, but by an eternal divine covenant.

“Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David rose up and rebelled against his lord” (6)

Jeroboam was set a king, not by God, but by his own deception, and his rebellion against his lord king Solomon; which, although God allowed to be, yet not according to His pleasure.. Abijah put the whole blame upon Jeroboam, for abusing the young age and immaturity of Rehoboam to stir the ten tribes up against him. The essence of the dissent, though, was that Jeroboam worshipped the golden calves and not the living God (8); and that he sent the priests of the sons of Aaron away, and appointed false ones instead. The right of Judah in the

throne, on the other hand, is set upon faithfulness and faith in the divine promise to king David.

“Then worthless rogues gathered to him, and strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and inexperienced and could not withstand them” (7)

The way he called Jeroboam “A rebel against his Lord”, he counted those who gathered to him, and encouraged him, as “worthless band”, an expression quoted from the book of Judges 11: 3; the way they are also called “the sons of Belial”, namely men without principle, who only care to set a king according to their own evil hearts.

“And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord, which is in the hands of the sons of David; and you are a great multitude, and with you are the gold calves which Jeroboam made for you as gods” (8)

It is obvious that Abijah was not an idol worshippers; hence he attacked those around Jeroboam, for worshipping the golden calves made by Jeroboam. Although Abijah did not remove the high places and the idols from his kingdom (2 Chronicles 14: 3-5), yet he kept the ministry of the temple of God. However great was the corruption in the kingdom of Judah in those days, yet it could not be compared to that of the Northern kingdom.

“You are a great multitude”; The Northern kingdom boasted over the kingdom of Judah, being more in number; but Abijah did not fear them, on account of that the multitude of golden calves among them would be the cause of their perdition; and not of their protection; for it would provoke God to anger against them.

“Have you not cast out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests like the people of other lands, so that whoever comes to

consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may be a priest of things that are not gods” (9)

Abijah proclaimed that Jeroboam and those who joined him, rebelled against the house of David, the legitimate royal house by the Lord, and cast out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, who alone have the right to lead and offer sacrifices; and appointed other false priests; *“so that whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may be a priest of things that are not gods”*

“But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the priests who minister to the Lord are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites attend to their duties” (10)

Yet, what they did, was not an insult against the two tribes: Judah and Benjamin, as much as it was is a rejection and forsaking of the living God, who has forsooken them as well. The kingdom of Judah, on the other hand, enjoyed the dwelling of God among them, saying: *“We keep the command of the Lord our God, and have not forsaken Him”*.(10).

Abijah was sure that he will prevail, not trusting in his military capabilities, but in the Lord his God, whom he has not forsaken.

“And they burn to the Lord every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense; they also set the showbread in order on the pure table, and the lampstand

of gold with its lamps to burn every evening; for we keep the command of the Lord our God, but you have forsaken Him” (11)

“For we keep the command of the Lord our God”. while you, on the other hand, have forsaken the Lord, the legitimate priesthood, and the upright worship; walked according to your own wrong human mind; set vain gods of your own making, and appointed priests who do not know the divine truth.

“Now look, God Himself is with us as our Head, and His priests with sounding trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O, children of Israel, do not fight against the Lord God of your fathers, for you shall not prosper” (12)

Abijah confirmed that there is no point in making war, for the conquest is not set upon military possibilities and experience, but upon faithfulness in worshipping God. I may say that Abijah’s speech was mainly set upon faith in the living God and the upright worship of Him.

Our Leader is with us, He lives and will never die; His real army are His priests who sound the trumpets that proclaim His sure conquest. Every opposition against Him will certainly fail. It would be, therefore, foolish for man or a people to enter into a confrontation against God.

4- ISREAL’S DEFEAT BEFORE JUDAH:

“But Jeroboam caused an ambush to go around behind them, so they were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them” (13)

With such a long speech from Abijah, Jeroboam found it a good chance to set an ambush to go around behind him, to find out that the battle was both at front and rear. Jeroboam did not utter a single word, pretending that he heard nothing, as a show of despise of Abijah, of his God and his army. He got instead, preoccupied

with planning and putting his plan into action. He counted his military ambush as the best response to Abijah's speech.

There is no doubt that the negligence of Abijah's army in watching the movements of their enemy, gave Jeroboam the chance to execute his ambush, that could result in putting Abijah and his army in the serious danger of being surrounded by Jeroboam's army, double in number, both from in front and behind.

“And when Judah looked around, to their surprise, the battle line was both at front and rear, and they cried out to the Lord, and the priests sounded the trumpets” (14)

The attachment of the priests to Abijah and his army played a great role in his ultimate conquest..

Judah entered into a bitter anguish because of the serious turn of events, and of their vulnerability before an enemy superior in number. They perceived that their only salvation would be by a divine intervention; according to the words of the psalmist: *“They surrounded me. Yes, they surrounded me; but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. They surrounded me like bees; they were quenched like a fire of thorns. For in the name of the Lord I will destroy them”* (Psalm 118: 11, 12)

Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor. If he chose to walk in the way of the Lord, his kingdom would have greatly prospered; but having challenged the Lord, sought what is his, and acted according to his human wisdom, he was defeated in war, his son died (1 Kings 14), and he lost both his present and eternity.

Abijah did not seek help from any other source, nor made an alliance with any nation against Jeroboam, but he, together with all his army, raised their hearts and eyes to God, the source of true conquest.. God allowed for them to go through such affliction, to motivate them to cry out to Him, and to perceive that their conquest was not through their might, possibilities, nor their military plans, but was from God; so that they would all say: *“This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith”* (1 John 5: 4)..

God allowed for Abijah to enter into a battle against Jeroboam, and helped him to have conquest; something He did not do with his father Rehoboam. Why?!

God probably intended for Rehoboam and Jeroboam to reconsider themselves. The former who acted according to the counsel of his wicked friends, and did not seek the counsel of the Lord before responding to the people who came to him; but used instead the way of violence without wisdom nor prudence. And the later who took the throne by force through stirring up the people. Both of them were actually in need of a time of tranquility and a true return to God...

Jeroboam probably sought to make the two tribes: Judah and Benjamin join the ten tribes under his reign.

At the start of Rehoboam’s reign, Jeroboam had not yet taken a strong negative stand against the worship of the living God; but once he eventually set the calves and cast the priests of God away; God allowed Abijah to chasten him.

“Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted it happened that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah” (15)

Here, the scene of the battle of Jericho by Joshua was repeated (Joshua 6) Sounding the trumpets refers to holding fast to God’s Word and His divine promises; While the shouting by the men of Judah refers to praising God by the

spirit of joy and gladness. Holding fast to the divine commandment and promises, together with singing God's praise with Joy, is the way to conquest over the devil and his hosts.

Abijah's army enjoyed the joy of God's salvation; whereas those of Jeroboam were struck by intense terror, and a feeling of failure and defeat.

“And the children of Israel fled before Judah. And God delivered them into their hands” (16)

“Then Abijah and his people struck them with a great slaughter, so that five hundred thousand of choice men of Israel fell slain” (17)

Although Jeroboam had ten tribes to set an army from them, double in number to that of Abijah who only reigned over two tribes, and both armies included mighty men of valor; yet Abijah's army prevailed upon Jeroboam's; for the conquest is not always for the strong; nor the truth with the majority.

“Thus the children of Israel were subdued at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the Lord God of their fathers” (18)

Although it was not said that Abijah did right in the sight of God, but God granted him conquest for the sake of holding fast to the divine promises, and for trusting in Him. Although Abijah was not like Joshua, for God to grant him what He did to Joshua on His entrance into Jericho; yet God remains faithful to His promises, as long as we trust in Him.

+ Being strengthened by Your strength, I shall daringly utter the following words: *“I will destroy my enemies; In the name of the Lord I will destroy them”*

(St. John Cassian)

+ *“I will love You, O Lord my strength; The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer”* (Psalm 18: 1, 2)

Yes, help me to love You; For You are my God, my Protector, My stronghold, and my sweet Hope in the midst of my afflictions.

I shall abide in You; For You are the goodness alone; and without You, the goodness does not exist.

Be my happiness, O wholly Goodness.

O Life! For Your glory, every creature lives.

You granted me life; In You I live, and without You I die.

I beseech You, Tell me where are You? Where shall I encounter You?, to hide in You completely; and not to exist outside You.

+ *“God is a shield to all who trust in Him”* (Psalm 18: 30). Whoever trust in Christ and not in the ‘ego’, will pass through the temptation peacefully; for faith produces hope.

(St. Augustine)

+ If you pray against your own evil covetousness, and the demons who fight against you, you should think of him who says: *“I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them; neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed. I have wounded them, so that they were not able to rise; they have fallen under my feet”* (Psalm 18: 37, 38) You may say that in the moment you arm yourself against your adversary with humility.

“And Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took cities from him: Bethel with its villages, Jeshanah with its villages, and Ephraim with its villages” (19)

“So Jeroboam did not recover strength again in the days of Abijah; and the Lord struck him, and he died” (20)

Jeroboam was weakened by that battle, was struck by God and died. Nevertheless the unity of the nation was not resumed as it were in the days of David and Solomon.

6- THE END OF ABIJAH’S LIFE:

“But Abijah grew mighty, married fourteen wives, and begot twenty-two sons, and sixteen daughter” (21)

“Now the rest of the acts of Abijah, his ways and his sayings are written in the annals of the prophet Iddo” (22)

The word “annals”, meaning (interpretation), usually accompanied with sermons, is derived from the Hebrew word ‘Medrash’, as it came in (2 Chronicles 24 27).

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 13

**YOU ARE, O LORD, MY STRONGHOLD, MY CONQUEST, AND MY
SALVATION**

+ Jeroboam managed to gain ten tribes against the house of David;

And could assemble an army double in number to that of Judah;
Jeroboam stood in battle supported by his huge army;
And Abijah stood, trusting in God

+ Abijah did not address his speech to his army to stir up their zeal;
But he addressed it to Jeroboam and the ten tribes;
He exhorted them to get attached to the living God, instead of the golden
calves;

Despising him, Jeroboam set an ambush to attack him from in front and
rear.

+ It was not however possible, neither for the superior number of the army,
nor for the good military plan,

to stand before him who trusts in God;
By the few he had, Abijah defeated the multitude of Jeroboam;
He chased him, and took cities from him.

+ In my battles against the devil, grant me O Lord,
To get attached to You, that no one can prevail on me;
You are my Refuge and my Stronghold in

life;

You are my conquest and salvation;
My heart will never fear, as long as You are in me;
Nor shall I fear death, For You are my life.

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CHAPTER 14

ASA KING OF JUDAH

Asa was one of the five kings whom God used for the revival of the kingdom of Judah, contrary to the Northern kingdom (Israel) over which nineteen kings reigned, and not a single one of them was good, nor made any reform. In the king of Judah, on the other hand, there were kings who were called “good”, and of whom five were prominent in reform: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah. As they had points of resemblance among themselves; there was diversity in their reform.

The three chapters (14-16) concerned the history of king Asa., who sat on the throne for 41 years, that could be divided into three stages:

The first stage (Chapter 14) covered ten years since the start of his reign, in which he walked with an upright heart; and the kingdom enjoyed peace as a fruit of the victory of his father Abijah over Jeroboam. During that period, Asa carried out some reforms, he cleansed the kingdom of the pagan worship, exhorted the people to seek the Lord (2-5); and cared for strengthening the military side. Yet, the secret of his success in this stage was seeking the Lord his God (7)

The second stage (Chapter 15). If the first stage has been that of peace, this stage was that of reforms; in which the king concentrated on uprooting all abominations from the land; and renewed the altar of the Lord.

The third stage (Chapter 16). A stage of perversion in his last years, and of God’s chastisement on him. This king persisted on living uprightly for most of his

life, but his fall in his last years are considered a warning to us; as according to the apostle: *“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls”* (1 Corinthians 10: 12).

- + Our standing fast here is not secure, until we get over the torrential currents of the present life, and sail toward a quiet haven. Do not therefore be puffed up by your standing fast, but take heed lest you fall. If the apostle Paul, who has more faith than us, so fears, how much more should we?!

- + The foremost in military tactics is to know how to stand fast; on which many things depend. The apostle Paul often speaks about standing fast, saying: *“Watch, stand fast in faith”* (1 Corinthians 16: 13); *“Stand fast in the Lord”* (Philippians 4: 1); *“Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls”* (1 Corinthians 10: 12); and, *“Having done all, stand fast”* (Ephesians 6: 13). There is no doubt that he does not mean just any way of standing fast, but the right way. Men of war are aware of the importance of knowing how to stand fast; so do the coaches and trainers of boxers and wrestlers..

(St. John Chrysostom)

1- The godliness of king Asa	1 - 5
2- The politics of king Asa	6 - 8
3- The conquest of king Asa over the Ethiopians	9 – 15

1- THE GODLINESS OF KING ASA:

“So Abijah rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. Then Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet for ten years” (1)

King Abijah reigned only three years; and the cause of his death came obscure in such a young age; which, according to some was some sort of (a tax), he and his family had to pay for being married to fourteen wives, and having twenty-two sons and sixteen daughter.

Asa his son came in his place; and to his godliness the Holy Book testified. His reign has been one of the longest among all the kings, and the Historian Josephus said about him: [Asa king of Jerusalem had a superb personality; he put God before his eyes; and did nothing, nor think of anything, but keeping the law. He reformed his kingdom, uprooted all abominations, and took off all defilements in it].

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“As did what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God” (2)

It is befitting of the believer to seek what would bring pleasure to God, and to do what is right in His eyes, and not what is right in his own eyes, or in those of men.

“For he removed the altars of the foreign gods and the high places, and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images” (3)

He was the first king of Judah who cared, since the start of his reign, to remove and to break down the high places.

“The high places”, appeared in the days of king Solomon, who built a high place for Chemoth the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is East of Jerusalem (1 kings 11:7)

“the wooden images”, Decorated pillars, taken after the Assyrians, engraved with images of sexual organs to stir up lust.

The book of the chronicles spoke about the religious reforms (3-5), that, to a great extent conform to what came in 1 Kings 15: 7-12, followed by a chapter (2 Chronicles 14: 6; 15: 15).that did not come in the book of the kings

He started reform directly after he sat on the throne; took away the pagan worship that infiltrated in the land in the last days of Solomon because of his foreign wives, and that, because no one cared to take it away, it became well established in the land, with its altars, idols, and gardens.

Asa did not intend to kill nor to destroy the idol-worshippers, but to provoke them to repent and to return to God. Yet, although the priests carried out their ministry in the temple, yet they did it with no enthusiasm, that it was neglected by many worshippers.

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“He commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment” (4)

The king commanded the leaders and the people to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and not the gods of the pagans, and to walk according to the law and the divine commandment, neglected for so long by many.. Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord, and desired that the leaders and the people would experience the sweetness of the divine commandment.

In his perversion, man sees in the divine commandment, a deprivation of, and a burden on the soul; while with his attachment to the Lord, he sees in it a precious adornment of his soul, as a holy heavenly bride who bears the beautiful image of her Creator. The goal of the Lord’s commandment is to present the Lord to us as the Groom of our souls, to unite with Him, and to gain the fellowship of the divine

nature (2 Peter 1: 4); namely to enjoy His features in us, to be prepared for the eternal wedding.

We are called by St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, in his hymns of the Feast of Passover, to see the divine commandments, not as mere commands, to do and not to do, but as precious jewels by which the soul is adorned.

+ How miserable you are, O my soul; How often have you satisfied your evil desires! Why should you burn together with your idols?!

He who betrothed you, has come. Go out to receive Him; He who offered you his ring, intends to have a wedding for you. Now, cast your idols away from you, get up, and enjoy your banquet.

As your engagement is accepted by His Father, therefore do not turn your face away from the Heir (Matthew 21: 38)

Behold, the jewels of His commandments are in your ears; the dowry of His laws are on your hands; the necklace of His priesthood around your neck, and the attire of His ministry on your body . Open up your secret place before Him with love; for He is *“the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal” in the wilderness* (Jeremiah 2: 2).

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

+ The goal of savoring the commandments of God, is to act and work according to them.

He who starts by savors the truth, saying: *“I will delight myself in Your commandments”* (Psalm 119: 47), will say after that: *“My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments”* (Psalm 119: 48). How beautiful it is to delight in the commandments and to understand their meaning, then to raise our arms up to do according to them.

Do not do according to the commandments, grudgingly or of necessity, but cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9: 7).

Delighting in them, and doing according to them, we should utter them (Deuteronomy 6: 7); hence he adds: "*I will meditate in Your statutes*" (Psalm 119: 48) namely, for the sake of my love for Your commandments, I shall not cease to talk about them, I shall always greatly delight in everything that concern Your truth,

(The scholar Origen)

"He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah, and the kingdom was quiet under him"
(5)

As the king, the leaders, and the people returned to the true Lord, and were committed to the law and the commandment, the land found rest after so long wars during the reign of the last two kings. There is no doubt that the conquest of king Abijah over the Northern kingdom, prepared the way for a period of peace in which his son Asa lived.

Representing the persistent man; once the kingdom found rest (14: 5), Asa did not do like David who cared for his own comfort while his army was in the battlefield; but Asa used the chance of peace to build fortified cities in Judah; and for arming his army (4: 6-7). He represents the alert man who is always ready, by the grace of God, to encounter any sudden attack by the enemy.

In case our souls find comfort from the attacks of the devil, we should not turn the comfort into slothfulness, but we should always be armed with the Word of God.

Talking about strife, father Cronstadt says: [Who made the way of the chosen to the kingdom of heaven narrow?The world presses on them, so does Satan, and his own body]. He also says: [If we do not strive daily to overcome the evil desires that perpetually attack us, to acquire the kingdom in our hearts; the evil desires will possess us with sweeping violence, and will rob our souls like thieves].

+ “The psalms of Ascent” teach us how to ascend and progress in our walk with God.

By the Holy Spirit, the psalmist calls us to ascend with the heart, namely to increase our holy and true desire; something that is greater than searching for “the spiritual feelings”.

Starting by faith, and believing in the truth of the unseen world of God, and in the steadfast foundation of His kingdom, this will kindle in us a living hope that we are the children of the kingdom; which, in turn, will make us pour the love of God on others. This will increase our desire to experience the eternal presence of the Lord, now, as well as in the endless life to come. That is what is meant by “ascent”

You may get terrified to hear a warning that the Lord will come like a thief in the night, according to the words of the Lord Himself, saying: *“If the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, you would have watched and not allowed the house to be broken into.*

Therefore, you also be ready” (Matthew 24: 43-44). In your terror and fear you may think: How can man prepare himself, if the hour comes like a thief? Is this fair?!. ... I start by saying to you:: Because you do not know the hour of His coming, you try to walk in faith all the time. God probably planned it this way, that we do not the hour of his coming, to be perpetually prepared; the way a slave prepares himself to receive his master. This hour would be a kind of a shock to those who count themselves as ‘masters of their own houses’; namely those who, with

pride, run their own affairs, regardless of the will of their true Master. ... Do not ever be, therefore, a master in this vain way, so as not to be shocked or terrified.

You may ask me: To whom then shall I conform? ... I tell you: conform to him whom the psalmist mean, saying: "Poor, I am, and sad".. If you always see yourself as poor and mourning in spirit (Matthew 5: 3), your eyes would perpetually be on the Lord, and will gain mercy from your labor, comfort, and consistent strength.

2- THE POLITICS OF KING ASA:

"And he built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest, he had no wars in those years, because the Lord had given him rest" (6)

Here, Asa's wisdom and seriousness are apparent; As the land had rest, he did not walk with luxury and slothfulness, but used the chance to fortify his cities. So it is befitting of the believer to be alert and to work diligently, even in the time of his comfort.

He built fortified cities; yet he trusted in the protection of God; So it is befitting of us not to cease our spiritual strife, even when there are no war before us, lest we would become spiritually lukewarm....The secret of his rest was not the great number of his warriors, nor his military might, or his possibilities, but "*Because the Lord had given him rest*" (6). So it would be when the believer walks in Christ Jesus, He grants him His peace, but "*not as the world gives*" (John 14: 27).

"Therefore he said to Judah, 'Let us build these cities and make walls around them, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us, because we have

sought the Lord our God, we have sought Him, and He has given rest on every side'. So they built and prospered" (7)

Asa did not refer the rest enjoyed by his nation, and the activities of construction he did, to his wisdom or godliness, but said: "*Because we have sought the Lord our God, we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side*" (7). That rest was a gift from God to encourage us to walk in His righteousness (See Haggai 2: 18-19; Malachi 3: 10).

There are many who, once they have rest, instead of giving thanks to God, and working for the edification of the congregation, they are drawn to get corrupt by pleasure and evil desires; as it happened when the children of Israel enjoyed the promised land, they forsook the Lord, and were drawn to the pagan abominations... On the contrary, rest did not motivate Asa to luxury and slothfulness, but was a chance for work; for he said to Judah: "*Let us build these cities and make walls around them, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is*

yet before us ... so they built and prospered” (7)... The same way could be said about the early church: “The churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9: 31)

“And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand men from Judah who carried shields and spears; and from Benjamin two hundred and eighty thousand men who carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty men of valor” (8)

The believer should not take it easy in the time of peace, but should always be prepared to confront probable opposition and wars; Hence Asa, in the period of rest, prepared an army of men of valor, and surrounded the cities with walls and towers, etc (7).

It is astonishing how the tribe of Benjamin, who, not far in the past were called “*the little Benjamin*” (Psalm 68: 27), had two hundred and eighty thousand men of valor, almost as many as what Judah had. The Lord blessed the few to become plenty; the two tribes worked together, even though each of them had his own talent.

4- THE CONQUEST OVER THE ETHIOPIANS:

The book reveals the fact that if the king trusts completely in God, he will prevail over his enemies; otherwise he will be punished.

“Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and he came to Mareshah” (9)

Zerah the Ethiopian: most probably from Arabia, and came with a support from Egypt. As a matter of fact there are two locations with the same name 'Cush': the first is Nubia, south of Egypt up to Ethiopia; and the second, in reference to that the spoil included sheep and camels, is east and south of Arabia close to Yemen. The talk here, most probably concerns the second region, **Maresha:** twenty-five miles south west of Jerusalem.

With an army of million men: There is no mention of the figure 'million; in the Hebrew language; instead 'a thousand of thousand' is used, meaning a great multitude.

despite the king's uprightness, and the response of the leaders and the people to him, yet a great affliction dwelt upon the land; which the Lord most probably allowed to show His glory . The Ethiopians attacked them with an army of a million men.

“So Asa went out against him, and they set the troops in battle array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah” (10)

“And cried out to the Lord his God, and said, ‘It is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; Help us O Lord our God, for we rest on

You, and in Your name we go against this multitude, .O Lord, You are our God; Do not let man prevail against You” (11)

Attacked by Zerah the Ethiopian with an army of million men and three hundred chariots, Asa resorted to God (14: 11); and the Lord struck the Ethiopians. Zerah could not stand, not before Asa, who counted himself powerless (11), but before the Lord and His army (13) – as Asa's army was called 'The army of the Lord'.

Trusting in the Lord, He granted him the following:

- a- Conquest over the enemy, all of whom became like dead.(13).
 - b- The war was counted the Lord's , not Asa's; for the king hid in the Lord, took refuge in Him; and his army was called 'the army of the Lord' (13).
 - c- Asa and his army plundered several cities, upon which the fear of the Lord came; and they carried away very much spoil (14)
 - d- They returned to Jerusalem (15) the city of God, near the temple of the Lord, to find strength through fellowship with the Lord. The army did not return to their camps, nor each man to his house, but to the city of God and to His house.
 - e- Asa did not erect memorials to commemorate his conquest, nor recorded it in archives; for he counted the conquest as from the Lord, and he and his army were just tools in His hand..
- Zerah, on the other hand, could not record his defeat, as it was a great disgrace for an army of million men.

The king's prayer, though short, yet was deep, and bore many meanings:

- a- He gave the glory to God for His might and authority; He who saves by many or by few; by the strong or by the powerless; works by His own strength, and not by weapons; as David said to Goliath: "*You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin; and I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied*" (1 Samuel 17: 45)
- b- The king did not say to the Lord that he has a strong army, and well prepared, to use and work with; but, the conquest will be from God "*for we rest on you*" (11).
- c- He did not say "*Do not let man prevail against us*"; but counting the war as against the Lord Himself, he said: "*Do not let man prevail against You*" (11).

Saying in his prayer: *“Oh Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power”*; he probably remembered the words said by Jonathan the son of Saul to his armor-bearer: *“It may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few”* (1 Samuel 14: 6); And the words said by Solomon on dedicating the temple: *“When Your people go out to battle against their enemies, wherever You send them, and when they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name; thn hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause”* (2 Chronicles 7: 34-35).

According to the apostle Paul: *“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions; quenched the violence of fire; escaped the edge of the sword; out of weakness, were made strong; became valiant in battle; turned to fight the armies of the aliens”* (Hebrew 11: 33-34)..

“So the Lord struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled” (12)

“And Asa and the people who were with him pursued them to Gerar. So the Ethiopians were overthrown, and they could not recover, for they were broken before the

Lord and His army. And they (Asa and Judah) carried away very much spoil” (13)

“Then they defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the Lord came upon them; and they plundered all the cities, for there was exceedingly much spoil in them” (14)

The Ethiopians were broken, not before Asa and his army, but before the Lord and His army, for *“the fear of the Lord came upon them”* (14)

Finally the wealth of the sinner turned into the hand of the righteous.

“They also attacked the livestock enclosures, and carried off sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem” (15)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES

14

BY YOUR DIVINE ARM, SANCTIFY AND SAVE ME, O MY GOD

- + Asa did what is right in Your eyes;
He uprooted and destroyed the idol worship;
And sought from his people to keep Your statutes and commandments.

- + By Your Holy Spirit, grant me the uprightness and the goodness;
Uproot every idol from my heart;
Destroy in me every evil desire;
Instead of the desires of the body, kindle in me those of the spirit;
Let my heart be enflamed by Your love; and my senses by Your grace;
Inscribe Your commandments in my heart;
To delight in them, and my depths would be adorned by Your splendor.

- + Adorn my soul with Your commandments;
To cherish them, for they are the heavenly jewelry;
By them I bear Your image, and be prepared for my wedding day.
Your Holy Spirit renews my depths every morning;
The heavenly hosts desire to rejoice for Your work in me.

+ The enemy is stirred up because he cannot endure Your wedding day;
What will save me from the bondage of the devil, but Your cross?
What will destroy his darkness, but Your resurrection.

+ Let the enemy and all his hosts be stirred up;
By You we can destroy all his tricks and evil works;
By You, we gain the conquest, and trust in You;
By You we set forth to heaven, and the enemy cannot catch us in his nets;
Glory be to You, O Grantor of conquest.



CHAPTER 15

ASA'S INTERNAL REFORMS

ENTRANCE INTO A COVENANT WITH GOD

Now, as Asa returned to Jerusalem, carrying spoils, and exultant with conquest, he felt that God is the secret of his conquest; and he probably thought how he should pay the Lord back for the abundance of His goodness.

Asa felt then that the reforms he has done was not yet consummated. By the Lord, he conquered his enemies on the outside; but there were more dangerous enemies who were not conquered yet, namely the idols of Judah, Benjamin, and of some lands of Israel that appreciated him, listened, and submitted to him. His victory on the outside provoked him to work inside to consummate the holy walk in the Lord.

1- A divine message to Asa on the tongue of a prophet	1 - 7
2- Asa's zeal to remove the idols	8
3- The spoils of war dedicated to the Lord	9 - 11
4- Making a covenant with God	12 - 15
5- A reform of the royal court	16
6- The high places were not removed	17
7- Bringing the dedicated things into the house of the Lord	18
8- Great peace for the kingdom	19

1- A DIVINE MESSAGE TO ASA ON THE TONGUE OF A PROPHET:

"Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded"

(1)

In that time there were also prophets in Israel (the Northern kingdom), like Hosea, Amos, Elijah, Elisha, and others. For, with the increase of the prophet of the Baal and the false prophets in the dissented kingdom of Israel, the Lord sent to them many prophets who performed miracles among the people apostatized from the Lord and worshipped the idols. God cares to perform miracles among the non-believers to encourage them to return to the divine truth.

How great is the exalted love of God! In most eras there were prophets and men of God sent to deliver divine messages to the kings, the people, and some time to the priests. It was amazing that despite the zeal of king Asa, and the presence of prophets among the people, yet some of them addicted idol worship, because of the carnal pleasures associated with them.

The king sent by God encountered the king, not to commend him and to congratulate him on his conquest, but to motivate him to worship God more, and to keep the divine commandment, and the covenant with God. The prophet did not come on his own but, "*but the Spirit of God came upon him*" (1). The prophet Azariah the son of Oded came to encourage king Asa, and to provoke him together with his people to enter into a covenant with God. By the work of the Holy Spirit in Azariah the prophet, he encountered king Asa to present to him, to Judah and Benjamin, the sound theological meaning of the battle. In his talk he presented to them three main things in God's work with them:

- 1- God is with Israel, as long as Israel is with God (2)
- 2- It is befitting of the people, together with the king, not to forget what happened in the era of the judges, when the people disregarded the teachings of the priests
- 3- God promises to keep on helping the king as long as he walks in the upright road.

Many who enjoyed conquest because they sought the Lord, and attached themselves to Him, Unfortunately the devil could turn their conquest into a trap for their perdition. Instead of giving thanks to God, they fell into pride or slothfulness in their relationship with God, and lost everything they have got..

We can say that the prophet Azariah came to encounter the victorious king and his army, to encourage them, and to warn them at the same time

“And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: ‘Hear me Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you” (2)

The essence of the divine message was: *“The Lord is with you while you are with him. If you seek Him He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you” (2)*. God does not force himself on anybody’s life, but longs to work in man, on condition that man, with his complete free will, wishes that God works in and by him.

On account of that the conquest would not endure with them if they pervert from God, and for fear that they might misuse the conquest given to them by God, , the prophet confirms to them: *“The Lord is with you while you are with him”*; and warns them, saying: *“If you forsake Him, He will forsake you”*

By saying *“He will be found by you”*; he means to say:: God will not only be found (with) you, but will be found (by) you.. The prophet refers to that God’s pleasure is not only to support them, but to accompany them, He opens up His arms, to reveal to them that He is there for them; and it is befitting of them, on their side, to become for Him as well..

He put before their eyes the very serious consequence of forsaking God; *“He will forsake you”*, as a response to their own wish, if not by tongue, it is by deeds. Counting forsaking Him, as a request by man to God to forsake him, God will respond to his request; according to the words of the psalmist: *“He shall give you the desire of your heart”* (Psalm 37: 4)

To give us another interpretation of that saying of the prophet, the historian Josephus says: [The reason they have got their conquest from God, is that they appeared as godly and religious people, who do everything according to the will of God. That is why ‘Azariah’ the prophet said that if they so persist, God will be consistent on giving them conquest on their enemies; and will happily live ever after; But in case they forsake His worship every thing will fall back to the contrary].

This concept that binds between worshipping God and the life of conquest, as presented by Azariah, is in complete harmony with the view of the book of chronicles in this concern.

The king most probably humbled himself before that divine message, which supported him for a long time; But unfortunately he perverted and fell in the snare of the devil in the last years of his life, as we shall see in the sixteenth chapter.

*“For a long time Israel has been without the true God,
without a teaching priest, and without law”* (3)

- a- According to some, the prophet speaks here concerning the pitch dark period of the judges, when Israel forsook the worship of the living God and worshipped foreign gods. There were priests among them, yet none of them was a ‘teacher priest’. They came to be without a law, despite the law of Moss within their hands; but the leaders, the people, and even the priests, at that time, were not preoccupied with the law.

God allowed for several nations, like the Moabites, the Medianites, the Ammonites, and others, to disturb them; yet amid their affliction they did not hasten to return to God; but because they cried out to Him, He sent judges to save them from their enemies.

- b- According to others, he speaks here about the Northern kingdom (Israel), that set calves for them to worship side by side of worshipping God. They betrayed God even while pretending to worship Him. They were without 'teacher priests' for the Levite priests left them to Jerusalem, together with some godly men.

- c- According to a third party, the prophet speaks here concerning what will happen in the future. The prophet Hosea says: "*For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return, seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days*" (Hosea 3: 4, 5)

The days of the Lord and the days of the devil:

Discerning between the days of the Lord and the days of the devil, in his commentary on what came in (Judges 2: 7); saying, "*So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua*", the scholar Origen says: [There are days of the Lord and days of the devil. What came here "*For a long time Israel was without the true God*" (3), most probably refer to the days of the devil, or the evil days. ... The following are the features of the days of the Lord and the days of the devil, as it came in his first sermon on the book of the judges:

1- The days of the Lord are righteousness, while the days of the devil are evil.

It is befitting of the believer to be in the days of Joshua, a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, to enjoy the days of righteousness; and not to be in the days of one of the evil kings like Pharaoh or Manasseh, and his days would be evil days.

+ And he says: “*So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua*”.

It is befitting of each of us to prove if he is in the good days or in the evil days; Does he acquire “the days of Joshua”, namely the days of righteousness, or he acquires the evil days.

For if we reach “*the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world*” (John 1: 9), and deliver ourselves to be enlightened by Him, and if in us “the Sun of Righteousness shines” (Malachi 4: 2), and enlighten our world, we shall, therefore acquire ‘the days of Joshua’; namely the days of Jesus Christ; the days of salvation.. Whereas, if man delivers himself to the “*the light that will go out*” (See Job 18: 5); the light that contradict the truth; he will acquire days which are all evil days. He will not be in ‘the days of Joshua’, but in those of Manasseh or Pharaoh, or in the days of the other evil kings.

(The scholar Origen)

2- The days of the Lord present to us a vision of Him who sits on the throne; and the days of evil will corrupt the insight.

The prophet Isaiah (the fifth evangelist), enjoyed a vision of the Lord “the Sun of Righteousness” sitting on the throne in the year king Uzziah died (Isaiah 6: 1); the king who became so arrogant with pride, to attempt to farce himself on the priesthood work, to be consequently inflicted with

leprosy on his forehead (2 Chronicles 26: 19). His days were all counted as evil; hence once he died, Isaiah enjoyed His joyful vision of the divine throne surrounded by the Seraphim, joyfully hovering and praising (Isaiah 6: 3). ... Therefore, as the evil man in us dies, and the new man who enjoys being healed by the Sun of Righteousness reigns (Malachi 4: 2), the our insight opens up, to enjoy a vision of Him who sits on the throne, and to partake of the praising of the heavenly hosts.

Let our days then be days of the Lord; for our depths to set forth as though to heaven.

- + Isaiah could not have the vision in the days of the oppressive and evil king Uzziah. He could not see “*the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up*” (Isaiah 6: 1-3), except after that evil king died, whose days were all evil. Then the prophet could see the Lord ... Listen to the prophet say: “*To you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise*” (Malachi 4: 2). There is no doubt, therefore, that God will let those have days of righteousness, those of “the days of Joshua”. ... He also says about the evil ones, that “the Sun of Righteousness’ shall heal them; It will no doubt heal those in whom justice was dead.

(The scholar Origen)

3- The days of the Lord are featured by the great peace; and the days of evil destroy the peace:

The Lord is the King of Peace (Hebrew 7: 2). When our days become days of peace, He fills our depths with His peace, even amid the afflictions; to make us experience the great divine inner peace.

+ The prophet tells us who will acquire the great peace. Listen to him say in the psalms: “Great peace to those who love Your name”

(The scholar Origen)

4- The days of the Lord are featured by the perpetual great light; and the light of the days of evil is deceptive;

Speaking about the days of Joshua the son of Nun, the symbol of Christ the Eternal True Light; and the days of the elders, a symbol of the apostles, who, by Christ have become light for the world;, the scholar Origen discerns between the true and the deceptive light as follows:

- a- He who has the days of the Lord enjoys the eternal true light, that time never destroys. Whereas the days of evil, may appear illuminated, but the light of evil is deceptive and will be put off.
- b- There is no fellowship between the true and the deceptive lights; as there is no fellowship between Christ and the devil.
- c- Some Gnostics believe that happiness lies in temporal pleasures, count the enjoyment of this pleasure as good bright light.
- d- The true light raises the heart up to the Heavens, to desire the heavenly life; while the deceptive light binds man to time and the things thereof, to seek the mortal earthly things, of riches, glory, and honor, counting them all as eternal.
- e- The divine Light gives us the Truth; while the deceptive light gives us vanity. .Hence the Lord warns us against the heretics who are bound to the false teachings.
- f- Among the heretics are some Gnostics like ‘Marcion’ who rejected the Old Testament; counted the Creator as not a good God. According to some Gnostics, God of the new covenant came to save the world from the Creator God.

g- The prayer or the encounter the Lord of glory Jesus is the way to enjoy the true Light and to be saved from the deceptive light.

- + To prove this from the Holy Books, listen to what is written: *“The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out”* (Proverb 13: 9; 18: 5-6). You see here, that the lamp of the wicked will be put out; whereas the “the light of the truth” will shine forever.

If someone foolishly believes that there is light which could be described as ‘the light of evil’, and at the same time as ‘the light of truth’; that could not be right; for God created the light to shine equally on everyone. Yet it is obvious that our (souls) are either enlightened by the true light (John 1: 9), which is never put out – namely Christ – or enlightened by the kind of light which is temporary and not eternal, which could be put out by him who can transform himself into the likeness of an angel of light (the devil) (See 2 Corinthians 11: 14). By such light is enlightened those who say that the enjoyment of pleasure is the greatest thing in life; and those who seek the riches, the worldly honors, and the earthly glory. By such light is also enlightened the heretics who proclaim their deceptive, vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge (1 Timothy 6: 20). Mercion was enlightened by such light, to dare to call God of the true law (the Old Testament) “not good”.

That is why, if we rightly understand the difference between the days enlightened by our Lord Jesus Christ “the True Light”; and the days enlightened by him who transforms himself to the likeness of an angel of light, that will eventually

be put out,... We can recognize the “the days of Joshua”, about which it is said: “*The people worshipped the Lord all the days of Joshua*”;

He who acquires in himself “the days of Joshua” would never serve the devil or greed; while he who is enlightened by the light of the truth would never serve the lies; nor he who is enlightened by the light of purity, would dedicate himself to evil desires or defilement. The apostle proclaimed “*What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?*

And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6: 14-15).

Let us therefore pray to the Lord Christ, “the true Light” (John 1: 9) to make in us perpetually the good days; and never to let us acquire in our souls the “evil days”, about which the apostle said: “*redeeming the time, because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5: 16).

We acquire evil days when we seek evil desires instead of spiritual things; the earthlies instead of the heavenlies; the mortal things instead of the eternal; and the present things instead of those to come..

When you therefore, see such evil desires stirred up in you, be sure that you are standing in “evil and corrupt days”.

That is why, you should dedicate yourselves to prayers to be liberated from the “evil days”; according to what the apostle say: “*that (God) may deliver us from this present evil age*” (Galatians 1: 4);

For according to what we have just said, not only our days will be “evil days”, but our entire age will be evil.

(The scholar Origen)

5- The days of the Lord are bound to His Word and wisdom (to the divine commandment):

The divine commandment works in the believer's days, to make him enjoy the divine wisdom and knowledge. The hearts of the apostles and the ministers are preoccupied with how to experience, by the divine grace, the sweetness and the activity of the commandment in our life; when we receive and be enlightened by the divine light .

+ Blessed is he who serves (worships) the Lord in the "days of Joshua" (Judges 2: 7); he who is enlightened by His Word, wisdom, and commandments, and who is granted the light of knowledge by His teaching

He is blessed, as well, he who serves the Lord in the days of the elders who survived Joshua; who, either lived in the days of Joshua or after Joshua; who are no one but the apostles who enlightened our hearts by their writings and principles; and brought in us the peaceful days of the light, who partook of it from "the True Light" (John 1: 9).

He, therefore, who is enlightened and learn from the teachings of the apostles, and is trained in the ministry of the Lord after the example of the apostles, is about whom is said: "*He served the Lord in the days of the elders who survived Joshua*".

Moreover, to know how, as the Savior "*the True Light who give light to every man came to the world*" (John 1: 9); the apostles also became "*the light of the world*"; it is written in the gospel that the Lord said to them: "*You are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5: 14). There is no doubt that through their principles, and their teachings, they enlightened to us "the days" in which we serve the Lord.

(The scholar Origen)

6- The day of the Lord makes the days of the elders longer:

The scholar Origen cared to talk about the days of the elders who came after Joshua; referring to the days of the apostles, with, and among whom Jesus the Lord of glory lived, even after his ascension to heaven; and whose days bore the features of the days of the Lord Christ.

The author of the book of Joshua cared to confirm that their days were long, not time-wise, but blessings-wise.

The scholar Origen often spoke that the fetus John the Baptist , who was not yet born, when St. Mary visited his house, performed an exalted work of preaching, while he was only six months old in his mother's womb. And counts that the days of the fetus of John the Baptist in the sight of God, longer than the years lived by the high priest and the priests who did not care to encounter the infant Jesus; and did not consummate their mission as preachers of the divine Truth.

Don't marvel when you hear the sayings of the apostle "*With the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*" (2 Peter 3: 8).. According to the scholar Origen, we shall see in the great day

of the Lord, children whose few days are counted as long years; and elders whose long years are counted as few days; and probably as nothing at all.

The days of the saints are called “long” for they are precious days of love; every breath of their life are uncountable; Whereas the wicked whose love become lukewarm, their days are short, mortal, and of little value. The days of the saints are long, diverse, and attractive, bear the names of the virtues they acquire through the grace of God, they call one day “love”, another “peace”, another “purity”, another “chastity”, and another “goodness” ... And together with the length of days, their souls bear the sweet and increasing fruition of the Spirit.

+ It seems not by chance that he says that the elders who survived Joshua (Joshua 2: 7), were of long lives. Actually it is only God who knows who among the elders who will come after Joshua, who will have “long days”, from whose soul great light will shine; whether Paul, Peter, Bartholomew, or John .Nevertheless , the saints are called “those of long lives”.

On the contrary, at the time when the world will be filled with temptations, *“when lawlessness will abound, and the love of many will grow cold”* (Mathew 24: 12), *“When the Son of Man comes, He will (barely) find faith on the earth”* (Luke 18: 8). In those days, it will not be said that it will be “long days”., but rather “short days”, according to the words of the Lord: *“Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved”* (Mathew 24: 22); Those days will consequently called “short days”. The “long days”, are the good days of long time to serve the Lord. For the sake of the chosen, the “evil days”, namely the days of iniquity and temptations, will be called “short days”.. I believe that once the evil days start to be

shortened for the sake of the chosen, they grow gradually shorter and shorter, until they entirely disappear. On account of such days, "Job" said: "*May the day perish in which I was born*" (Job 3: 3)

Therefore, the evil days for the chosen will be shortened, and disappear; while the days of the saintly elders will be longer.

"The people worshipped God all the days of Joshua" (Judges 2: 7). He did not say 'one day of Joshua's'; but "the days of Joshua". According to this order, how many days shall we count? I believe that one of his days will be "justice", another "purity", another "humility", and another "mercy"; and so on of the good virtues and features, counted as "the days of Joshua", through which the Lord will be served; for such virtues of the soul will bring pleasure to the Lord. Perseverance, compassion, godliness, goodness, and all things concerning the virtue, could be called his days.

As such, you will serve the Lord throughout "the days of Joshua"; for the commandments of the Holy Books do not wish you to acquire in your souls some features of these virtues, and not of others; but to be adorned with all these virtues until you consummate them "to serve the Lord". He who acquires "the days of the elders" in his soul, "and serves the Lord in their days" (See Judges 2: 7); will heed the words of the apostle: "*Therefore, I urge you, imitate me, as you have us for a pattern*" (1 Corinthians 4: 16; Philippians 3: 17).

(The scholar Origen)

7- The day of the Lord and the knowledge of all the works of the Lord:

It is befitting of us to have all our days for the Lord, through which we “know” all his works. Keep them, and practice them; lest we may be counted as not knowing them. The scholar Origen clarified to us the concept of the word “know”, which is to practice something practically, and not just have mental knowledge of it.

+ *“all the days of the elders who had seen (know) all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel”* (Judges 2: 7). Who is he who knows all the works of the Lord except he who does them?

Actually , as it was said about the sons of ‘Eli’ the priest: *“They were corrupt; they did not know the Lord”* (1 Samuel 2: 12). They certainly knew (about) the Lord, for they were teachers of the law; but they acted as if they did not know Him. By this same way, we should listen to what is written: *“those who knew all the works of the Lord”*; namely they know righteousness, purity, perseverance, compassion, godliness, and anything according to the commandments of the Lord, that are called “the works of the Lord”.... There are, as well “the works of the devil” that are contrary to the “works of the Lord”. Surely, as the “righteousness” is a “work of the Lord”, the “iniquity” is a “work of the devil”. And as the compassion is a “work of the Lord”, anger and grudge are “works of the devil.

According to what became clear in the Holy Book concerning the terms “know” and “does not know”, read what is written in another place: *“He who keeps the commandment will experience nothing harmful”* (Ecclesiastes 8: 5 LXX). [He who keeps (or knows) the commandment knows no evil word]. Is this possible? Actually he

knows, but it is said (he knows no evil word) for he keeps himself from and avoids the evil words.

What is said about the Lord that "*He knows no sin*" (2 Corinthians 5: 21). So it is said on account of that He committed no sin. In the same way then, he who (knows) the works of the Lord, (does) the works of the Lord. And he does not know the works of the Lord, does not do them.

(The scholar Origen)

8- The day of the Lord is the day of His great salvation of the world by the cross:

Although all the works of the Lord are great and exalted, yet they could not be compared to His redemption.

+ "*Who had seen (known) the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel*" (Judges 2: 7). Are there "little works" of the Lord, beside those "great works"? I believe that all the Lord's works are great; but if compared to one another, they could be said, they are great or little according to the ability of those who get them, with whom God works.

For example: God led the children of Israel out of Egypt by a strong hand and a stretched arm (Deuteronomy 5: 15; and see Exodus 6: 6; 13: 3); He disturbed the Egyptians by prophetic and heavenly signs; "*He made the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided*" (Exodus 14: 21); He gave the people Manna in the wilderness from heaven (See Exodus 16; Wisdom 13: 3); He talked to Moses (See

Exodus 19: 3); and gave the law written on two tablets of stone (See Exodus 24: 12). But if all those works are compared to the salvation of the world: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*" (John 3: 16), you will find that all of them are little compared to the greatness of this work, which we should know and believe.

We should get preoccupied with the works of the Lord (See John 6: 28-29), not through slothfulness but by faith and alertness, so that we would be "in the days of Jesus Christ", and "in the days of the elders", namely His apostles, to become, together with them, worthy to partake of the heavenly inheritance through our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, glory and dominion be to Him, forever, Amen (1 Peter 4: 11).

(The scholar Origen)

"But when in their trouble they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them" (4)

He presented to Judah a serious example, namely those in Israel who lived a long time without a true God, a teacher priest, nor divine law; Yet, once they returned to God and sought Him, He was found by them (4).

He did not say 'they found Him', but "*was found by them*"; to be able to sing, saying: "*I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine*" (Song 6: 3). So will those who seek the Lord feel, He will become theirs, their own beloved.

+ It is the right of the soul to rejoice, for she reached to a high position in her ascent to the top of her desires. What would be greater than to reach to

the vision of the Lord?!. But what she has achieved is nothing but a start of what she will meditate in after this.

The bride and the groom unite together: God in the soul, and the soul will again dwell in God. The bride will say: "*I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; the shepherd among the lilies*" (Songs 6: 3). He Himself

who changed the human life from the shadows to the climax of the Truth. Notice how high the bride reached; progressing from strength to strength, as said by the prophet (Psalm 84: 7); and appears as though she has

got the climax of her desires. For what would be greater than to be with her beloved, and Him to be in her?!

+ The bride says: "*I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine*". In conforming with Christ, she receives from Him the early blessing of our nature according to the former image of beauty, and like Him, who alone is worthy of glory and love. That would be like a mirror elaborately done, that reflects an image exactly conforming to the face. When the soul puts her things in order, and rejects every material defilement, she would become an image of the pure beauty.

When the soul says with her free will: "When I look into the face of my beloved, the beauty of his face reflects on mine"; Paul imitates these words by saying: "*It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*" (Galatians 2: 21). And when he says: "*For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*": (Philippians 1: 21), Paul means to say that he has purified himself of any human weakness, like sorrow, anger, fear, cowardice, strong evil desires, pride, foolishness, envy, revenge, love of possessing,, or any other desire that may lead to the destruction of the soul.

Christ, alone, is the One who fills my soul, and nothing else of what I just mentioned. All my apparent outer nature is taken away, and there is nothing left inside me but Christ. Yes indeed, life for me is Christ; as the bride of the song says: *"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine"*. He is the purity, non-defilement, the Light, and the Truth that nourishes my soul. He Himself is nourished by the magnificence of His saints. The lilies inspire with their splendor and the radiation of their beautiful colors.. That is why, he who feeds among the lilies will lead his flock to the pastures of the lilies, *"to let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us"* (Psalm 90: 17)

We come to be like the food we eat. Let us take an example in the crystal vessel. All what is put in it will appear clearly; namely the vessel itself will turn into what it contains. It is like this when we put the lilies in our soul; it radiate to the outside the things it contains inside.

To clarify this point; the soul nourishes itself by the virtues that symbolically called "lilies"; and the person adorned with them will radiate a good life, showing every kind of virtue.

Let us suppose that the pure lilies, which are: self-control, moderation, righteousness, courage, etc. of all what the apostle says, are pure, true, noble, worthy of love, just, holy, compassionate, virtuous, and worthy of glory (Philippians 4: 8); all these virtues are developed in the soul as a result of the pure life, and adorn the soul that have them. ... That is why the bride gives herself to her beloved, and receives the beauty of whom she loves.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

“And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the land” (5)

By “those times” he means the period of the judges, and the ten tribes who dissented from the house of David, and rejected the Levite priesthood, etc.; which also applies to every other period in which man gives God the back and not the face.

So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity” (6)

But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded” (7)

He calls on Judah to be strong, not to let their hands be weak, depending on the conquest they have already got (7)

Man is committed to work with diligence and joy, whether in his worship or in his daily life.

2- ASA’S ZEAL TO REMOVE THE IDOLS:

And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from the land of Judah and Benjamin, and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the Lord that was before the vestibule of the Lord” (8)

The hearts of the king and his servants were kindled with zeal, their effort to reform became stronger, and they uprooted the defilements left by Jeroboam in

every place. He has started uprooting them, and here he consummates what he started.

The serious believer will never cease to grow. Asa started the movement of reform since the beginning of his reign; got more zealous when he entered into affliction during his war against the Ethiopians; and when he had conquest, he referred it to the law, to get stronger and stronger. Now with the message that he received on the tongue of Azariah the son of Oded, he took courage and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and from the cities he had taken in the mountain of Ephraim. His zeal increased to perform other reforms, to confirm the presence of God in the midst of his kingdom.

“He restored the altar of the Lord”; It so seems that the altar of the burnt offerings needed some restoration, although it was only 35 years since Solomon built it, probably as a result of negligence during the wars between Judah and Israel,

We see how Asa did what is good and upright in the sight of the Lord his God, how he removed the foreign altars and broke the idols, etc. *11: 2), how he strove and sought the Lord who granted him the conquest; how he inclined his ear to the words of the prophet, and did not admonish him on saying: *“If you forsake Him (God), He will forsake you”* (15: 3); but hastened to remove all the abominable things from the cities which were taken from the mountain of Ephraim and from the land of Judah; and restored the altar of the Lord which was before the court of the Lord. He carried out a deeper movement of cleansing and sanctification.

He also found in the words of the prophet a chance to assemble Judah, Benjamin, and those who came from the tribes of Israel, who got in touch with the work of God in Asa’s life; who entered into a renewal of the covenant of God; and sought Him with their whole hearts, and He was found by them (15: 15). With

every movement of reform, the leaders and the people needed to renew the covenant with God.

4- THE SPOILS OF WAR DEDICATED TO THE LORD:

“Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who sojourned with them from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him” (9)

We have already seen how some godly men in the Northern kingdom set forth to Judah. Now those coming from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, to the south increased in number, having been impressed by the faithfulness of Asa in his life and worship. He called them *“those who sojourned with them”*, namely the foreigners; as the two peoples Judah and Israel became like foreigners to one another after the division.

They came to Jerusalem to proclaim their wish to gather together around the king from the house of David, longing for the true worship and the attachment to the temple of the Lord. *“They saw that the Lord God was with him” (9)*. His attachment to the Lord gave him ‘awe’, not only among the people of Judah, but among those godly men from Israel; who came to join him; saying with the prophet Zechariah: *“Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8: 23)*.

“So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa” (10)

Having been gathered together by the king to a general assembly, they came in the fear of God in the third month, probably in the feast of the Pentecost, or that of the weeks.

“And they offered to the Lord at that time seven hundred bulls and seven thousand sheep from the spoil which they had brought” (11)

The size of their offerings might not be compared to those offered by King Solomon, probably because of a lesser zeal or lesser possibilities.

5- MAKING A COVENANT WITH GOD:

“Then they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and all their soul” (12)

They entered into a covenant with God with repentance, as they have broken their covenant with him; and they promised to walk in a better way. In renewing the covenant they sought the Lord more diligently, sought His compassion, and promised to keep His commandments.

“And whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman” (13)

They decided that whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death, being either an atheist or an idol-worshipper; a decision that conforms to the law (Deuteronomy 7: 2 etc.); and to the era of violence in the idol worship practices, like offering human sacrifices, even the children of the worshipper; which were introduced even to Judah and Benjamin.

Now, in the era of grace, we are not required to do that literally, but symbolically; for the weapons of our fight are spiritual and not material.

“Then they took an oath before the Lord with a loud voice with shouting and trumpet and rams’ horns” (14)

That covenant was proclaimed publicly without any reservation, but with joy, not like one done by a debtor before his creditor; with the spirit of fear; but like a bride who boasts her love and obedience to her Groom, who delivered His life for her sake.

“And all Judah rejoiced at the oath for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around” (15)

The covenant was made with faithfulness and persistence, they vowed with their whole hearts, and sought Him with their whole will; and He was found by them. What they did, came from their hearts and with their complete will, namely with pleasure and exultation.

5- A REFORM IN THE ROYAL COURT:

“Also he removed Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah; and Asa cut down her obscene image, crushed and burned it by the brook Kidron” (16)

He tells us what came in 1 Kings 15: 13-14, about how Asa removed his grandmother, the idol-worshipper, from her political position as the ‘queen mother’.

All movements of reform Asa has done in the cities of Judah and Benjamin, and in the cities that joined him from Israel, the renewal of the covenant, and the spirit of exultation, have not preoccupied him from reforming his own household. He

removed his grandmother from her position as the queen mother; for she had made an obscene image of Asherah; he crushed and publicly burned it by the brook of Kidron. By that he exalted above the family relationships for the sake of the glory of God..

By a spirit of loyalty, courage, and zeal, Asa did not flatter even his own grandmother, the queen mother. In most of the world in the old days, a great authority was given to the mother or grandmother of the king, for the sake of her experience and honor. Yet Asa removed his grandmother because of her attachment to the pagan worship; perceiving that he should honor God more than his grandmother. Most probably Maacah perceived her sin; and hence she was not killed, but was only removed from her position as a queen mother. Asa probably sent away her pagan entourage, and confined her to her place of residence,

6- THE HIGH PLACES WERE NOT REMOVED:

*“But the high places were not removed from Israel.
Nevertheless the heart of Asa was loyal all his days” (17)*

Asa, did not remove the high places from the cities of Israel that submitted to him. It was befitting of him not to be slothful in this concern, which may seem as a minor thing compared to his huge achievements of reform, his great works, and strife.

The chapter ends by a notice that Asa was not completely successful; by which it prepares us to what will come in the next chapter about his shortcomings in his last days.

7- BRINGING THE DEDICATED THINGS INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

“He also brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated; silver and gold and utensils” (18)

8- GREAT PEACE FOR THE KINGDOM:

“And there was no more wars until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa” (19)

Although there were minor clashes and little confrontations between Asa and Baasha king of Israel, yet there was no major battles.
By the thirty-fifth year, he means, after the division between the two kingdoms.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 15

SANCTIFY MY DAYS, AND PROCLAIM YOUR DWELLING IN ME

- + My God, when king Asa was attached to You;
His first days were sanctified;
At that time, Israel had no days without a true God;
But its days became like those of Jushua the son of Nun;
It enjoyed conquest, righteousness, and peace.

- + Let the days of my life be good days and not evil days;
Shine on them, Oh Sun of Righteousness,
Do not let the devil with his deceptive light, crawl into my heart;
Nor let him draw my life to evil and corruption;

Sanctify my life, that my days would be counted as Your days, O my Savior;
Give me Your grace; clothe me with Your righteousness; Grant me Your peace.

+ Let me seek You, to find You for me;
Let me meditate in You, saying: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine";
Turn my earthen vessel into a pure crystal one;
Let Your image transfigure in me; and Your splendor reflect on me;
Let my depths be satisfied by You, not to seek anyone else;
Be my light, glory, satiety, and riches;
Let me find in You my comfort and happiness.

+ Destroy every idol in me;
Remove every abomination and defilement from my depths;
Turn my heart into a holy altar for You;
Let the sound of joyful shouts be heard in me;
Let a sweet fragrance of incense ascend from my depths;
Be glorified in me by the works of Your grace;
Open up the doors of paradise before my heart;
Dwell in me; and let me dwell in You, O my heart's desire.

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CHAPTER 16

THE DECLINATION OF ASA IN HIS LAST DAYS

Asa prospered in his relationship with God, whether in confronting the enemies, when he, confessing that he is without power; relied on the Lord his God, and conquered his enemies. He prospered in oppressing the idol-; worship, cleansing the land, and re-establishing the worship of the Lord everywhere. Yet he resorted to the half-solutions in dealings with the cities which he took from Israel, leaning upon the human wisdom in pride and haughtiness, to gain them on his side; being said: *“But the high places were not removed from Israel”* (15: 17).

God gave him many chances to repent, of which he did not benefit, but misused. Of those chances are:

- 1- God allowed Baasha king of Israel to come up against Judah to build Ramah; to let no one go out or come in to Asa; by which he probably prepared for war against Judah. Instead of resorting to God with the spirit of repentance and attachment to Him, he resorted to the king of Aram to support him, and to break his treaty with Israel.
- 2- God gave him a second chance to reconsider himself; He sent to him Hanani the seer to rebuke him, and to confirm to him that, by his wrong behavior, he lost the conquest over both Israel and Aram, and to remind him of the conquest he previously had on Zerah the Ethiopian with his huge army. But Asa did not listen to the seer but insulted him and put him in prison.
- 3- God gave him a third chance through a serious malady that confined him to bed, the way he confined to the seer to prison. But instead of

repentance and raising his heart to God, he got his heart lower to earth to dig a tomb that befits his alleged honor, to accommodate his dead body, that the spices whatever their kind and cost would never be able to keep from corruption.

This chapter calls us first not to depend upon our good past; for man may live his youth sanctified to the Lord; but in his old age he may get haughty and slothful, and would not listen to the Lord. And secondly to respond to the continuous call of God, in different ways, to return to Him and to get attached to Him through repentance.

- + Until when will you disobey Christ who calls you to His heavenly kingdom?
... This is the time for repentance; while there will be the time for reward
.... This is the time for labor; while there will be the time for the wages; ...
This is the time for perseverance, while there will be the time for comfort.

- + When you get preoccupied with a certain sin, Accuse yourself (Proverb 18: 17), and do not wait for others to accuse you. You will then be like someone who accuses himself in his first appearance before the judge.

(St. Basil the Great)

This chapter, ending the history of king Asa, unfortunately does not tell good news about his last days, like what we saw at the beginning of his reign.

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| 1- A foolish treaty between Asa and Ben-Hadad king of Aram | 1 - 6 |
| 2- God rebukes Asa on the tongue of Hanani the seer | 7 - 9 |
| 3- Asa gets offended by what the seer told him | 10 |
| 4- Asa's sickness and death | 11 – |

1- A FOOLISH TREATY BETWEEN ASA AND BEN_HADAD KING OF ARAM:

“In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah” (1)

According to some the “*thirty-six year*” here refers to the thirty-sixth year since the division of the kingdom, namely directly after the death of king Solomon. It will then be the year 986 BC, conforming to what came in 1 Kings 16: 6-8; For Asa lived ten years in peace (14: 1). However according to the historian Josephus, the year is written wrong; for it is the twenty-sixth year, and not the thirty-sixth year.

Baasha king of Israel built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah (1), to keep his people from joining him, and losing more cities to Judah; He might had the intention to enter into war against Judah. According to some, what Baasha did was allowed by God to chasten Asa for not repenting, and for his negligence to remove the high places in the cities of Israel which submitted to him (15: 17).

“Then Asa brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the Lord and of the king’s house, and sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying” (2)

Here it shows how deep Asa went down, that when Baasha came out against Judah, Instead of seeking the counsel of God, the way he did when he was attacked by Zerah the Ethiopian; he, in fear and disturbance, he brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the Lord and of the king’s house, and sent it to Ben-Hadad king of Aram (Syria) to break his treaty with Baasha

king of Israel;; and instead of trusting in the Almighty God, he intended to break that treaty by human ways.

Asa, who trusted in God when Zerah the Ethiopian attacked him, is now disturbed by Baasha king of Israel. And instead of resorting to God, he resorted to the king of Aram to help him against Israel. His human plan succeeded for some time, for once Ben-Haded got the silver and gold, brought from the house of the Lord, he broke his treaty with Baasha, finding in it a chance to strike the cities of Ephraim.

The heart of Asa was not faithful to God nor upright; but divided between a day for the Lord, and a day for trusting in human arm. He entered into a series of sins, each one led to another::

- 1- This fault did not come all of a sudden, but came as a fruit of his slothfulness; having – as we said – resorted to half solutions in his dealings with the cities he took from Israel; trusting in the human wisdom, in an attempt to gain their trust; as it is written: “*The high places were not removed from Israel*” (15: 17).
- 2- Trusting in human wisdom, made him disregard seeking the Lord’s counsel when Baasha king of Israel attacked him; the way he did when Zerah the Ethiopian attacked him at the beginning of his reign,
- 3- He did wrong by his foolish treaty with the pagan king; For if he followed his father’s lead he would have made instead a covenant with God.
- 4- He did not consider the honor and peace of his brethren the people of Israel. He could have dealt with the situation in another way to avoid making a treaty with a pagan king against his brethren; and opening the door before him to have a place in Israel, and eventually be a source of disturbance to Judah in the future.

- 5- He used the bribe to let Ben-Hadad break his treaty with Baasha king of Israel; something that contradict with honor and traditional relationship between nations and kings.
- 6- What made his sin worse, was that Asa took the silver and gold from the house of the Lord; for the sake of a worldly purpose. It was more befitting of him to raise prayers and supplications to the Lord in His house; in order to enter into a friendship with God, which would not cost him what he paid to Ben-Hadad.
- 7- Asa became responsible before God for the blood that Benhadad shed in Israel; and for the spoils he robbed thereof (14).

“Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. Here I have sent you silver and gold, come break your treaty with Baasha king of

Israel, so that he will withdraw from me” (3)

“So Ben-Hadad heeded king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali” (4)

“Now it happened when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work” (5)

“Then king Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building, and with them he built Geba and Mizpah” (6)

When Baasha stopped building Ramah, Asa carried away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha used for building, and with them he built Geba, two miles and a half East of Ramah, and Mizpah the same distance North of Ramah; to be secure from Israel.

2- GOD REBUKES ASA ON THE TONGUE OF HANANI THE SEER:

“And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him,: ‘Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand” (7)

Asa assumed that he acted wisely, and that his plan was completely successful; for Baasha ceased to build Ramah; and on another aspect, he increased the territory of Judah, and its security from Israel. Many among the leaders and the people of Judah might have commended him for his wisdom and good policy; Yet God, being displeased, He sent to him Hanani the seer to exhort him to return to Him with repentance.

Hanani the seer: The father of Jehu, another prophet about whom we read in 1 kings 16: 1; 2 Chronicles 19: 2.

We noticed many faults in the alliance of Asa with Ben-Hadad; but the worst of them as revealed by the seer was relying upon the king of Aram, and not on the Lord his God. Asa probably assumed that God is either incapable of giving him conquest, or not wishing him to have it. He lost his trust in God, and resorted to Ben-Hadad to save him. That is why the prophet told the king clearly that his action was foolish, for he leaned on a broken stitch which pierces the hand, instead of relying on God the Rock of Ages.

Relying upon Ben-Hadad king of Aram saved the latter from the army of Asa. If Asa cried out to the Lord as he did before when Zerah the Ethiopian attacked him; the king of Aram, being an ally of Baasha king of Israel, would have fought against Asa; and would have fallen, together with Baasha in Asa’s hand.

Contrary to his grandfather David, who humbled himself before the prophetic word (12: 6); Asa stretched his hand with harm against the prophet; and became the first king of Judah to do such a thing.; for which the Lord chastened him.

“Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand” (8)

The prophet said to the king that it was befitting of him, more than any one else, to trust in God, on account of his past experience in his battle against the Ethiopians, in how God saved him against such a huge army, with such enormous military equipments (14: 9-15).

It is befitting of us in our afflictions to remember God’s past dealings with us and with our fathers in similar situations; and that our Lord is the same yesterday, today, tomorrow, and forever. So why shouldn’t we trust on Him?!

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore, from now on you shall have wars” (9)

In his foolishness, Asa lost his peace with God; and heard the prophetic voice, saying: “From now on you will have wars against you”.. Man often sins by trusting on the human arm to save him from affliction, to end up reaping a perpetual anxiety; and come to have God Himself against him; entering into unceasing wars.

Asa surely knew that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him; which means:

- a- Knowing for sure that the Almighty God of the whole world, His mercy is without limits; How would we trust in the creatures and not in the Creator?. God's eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth; and nothing will escape them. ... Seeing the Savior as such, St. John said: *"I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as though it had been slain; having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth"* (Revelation 5: 6).
 - b- God shepherds His people when their hearts are completely toward Him, rely on Him, and trust in Him. He manages all things for their salvation, because of His amazing love for those who believe in Him, and are faithful in their relation with Him (Isaiah 45: 4; Ephesians 1: 22).
 - c- Those with upright hearts before God, have complete trust in His protection. Lack of trust in God reveals that we are far from Him, our despair in dealing with Him, and relying on human arm.
- + Can anyone marvel at the power of the divine mind to stretch to every part of the world, run to and fro here and there; control everything, and judges everything, being omnipresent; if the human mind, even though confined in a heavy mortal body; that hinders it, has the power and the ability of wandering with no obstacle?!

(Lactantius)

3- ASA GETS OFFENDED BY WHAT THE SEE TOLD HIM:

“Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged by him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time” (10)

Asa’s heart was not complete before God, as proclaimed by Hanani the seer (7-10). Despite his past experience all those years, and his walking in the way of perfection; he was slothful in not removing the high places in the land that became submitted to him, counting that it is good enough to return to God. This slothfulness led to a more serious one, when he delivered the silver and the gold of the house of the Lord to the king of Syria to break his treaty with Israel. And when Hanani the seer came to warn him against that perversion, he put him in prison.

Asa became an enemy against the Word of God in the person who bore it (the prophet Hanani). And when his behavior brought sorrow to some of his people, he oppressed them.

5- ASA’S ILLNESS AND DEATH:

Asa did not endure God’s rebuke to him on the tongue of His prophet; even though he knows for sure that what the prophet said was coming from the Lord Himself, and that it was a just rebuke to motivate him to return to God, and to show remorse for his wrong deeds. But in the pride of his heart, instead of repentance, he added to his fault a greater evil, his arrogance, stubbornness, and rejection of wise counsel of the man of God..

Not enduring any objection to his foolish behavior, he fell into anger, to stand, not against the prophet, but before the face of God Himself. Then, turning his anger into a desire for revenge, he put the prophet in prison as an evil doer.

“And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time” (10). Probably because they attempted to intervene to set the prophet free; or they served the prophet while he was in prison. The king turned from a servant of his people into a stubborn tyrant.

“Note that the acts of Asa, first and last, are indeed written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel” (11)

“And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was very severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians” (12)

Although God allowed for Asa to get ill, because he did not listen to Hanani the seer; he was committed to return by repentance to God to heal him.; *“Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up” (Hosea 6: 1).* But instead of returning to the Lord, the Physician of the souls and the bodies, he sought the mortal physicians (12).

For the sake of his faithfulness all that time, God allowed for his chastisement, he was afflicted by being diseased in his feet for two years; and the malady was very severe; yet Asa did not forsake his evil.

Having put the seer in prison, God chastened him by confining him to bed, with a malady in his feet; to let him feel his weakness and helplessness. He did not shackle him with seen chains, but with malady. He lost his fellowship with God, rejected the divine commandment, and became angry on the man of God, and on the true believers. And in his malady he did not return to God with repentance.

It so seems that an extremely abhorrent smell came out from his feet, despite the fragrance of the spices with which they filled his bed; yet those spices could not take away his corrupt smell before the Lord.

The king was afflicted by a very painful malady in his feet, probably 'Gout'. As he put the prophet's feet in the stocks of the prison, his sins put him in the stocks of the severe malady that confined him motionless to bed; to provoke him to recognize his sin, and to return to the Lord. But arrogantly and stubbornly he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians. There was no harm in seeking the physicians, but he should first seek mercy from the Lord; who could heal him through the human physicians and their medications. For it is God who created the herbs for treatment; and who give the understanding and knowledge to the physicians to serve humans through their specializations. But not in arrogance and stubbornness against God, and a disregard of, and not trusting in His grace..

The physicians whom he sought were most probably pagan aliens who used magic and sorcery, not science and knowledge.

Joshua the son of Sirach, who was said to be a physician himself, wrote a magnificent essay about "Medicine and physicians", saying:

Honor physicians for their services, for it is the Lord who created them;
For, although their gift of healing comes from the Most High; the
physicians are rewarded by the king;

The skill of the physicians makes them distinguished
And in the presence of the great they are admired;;

The Lord created medicines out of the earth; and the sensible will not
despise them;

Was not water made sweet with a tree (Exodus 15: 25); by which God's
power might be known?

And He gave skill to human beings that He might be glorified in His
marvelous works?

By medications the physician heals, and takes away pain;.

God's works will never be finished, and from Him health spreads over all
the earth;

My child, when you are ill, do not delay; but pray to the Lord, and He will heal you;

Give up your faults, use your hands rightly, and cleanse your heart from all sins;.

Offer a sweet-fragrant sacrifice, and a memorial portion of choice flour; and pour oil on your offering, as much as you can afford;

Then give the physician his place; for the Lord created him. Do not let him leave you, for you need him.

There may come a time when recovery lies in the hands of physicians; For they too pray to the Lord to grant them success in diagnosis, and in healing, for the sake of preserving life;

He who sins against his Maker, will be defiant toward the physician.

(Sirach 38: 1 – 15)

- + Every skill is a gift from God; not to consummate a lack in nature ... We are told that we are dust, and to dust we shall return; We are clothed with a body prone to suffering and death; and to illness because of sin;... Yet we are given the science of medicine as a gift from God to heal us even to a little extent.

(Father Ambrose)

- + God gave the earth and its herbs for the sake of healing the body; and gave His command to treat the body made of dust by things taken from dust (the herbs) ... Once man fell out of paradise, he instantly came under the ailments of the body ... That is why God granted medicine to the world for the sake of its comfort, healing, and care of the body; and allowed

those who cannot deliver themselves completely into the hands of God to use them.

(St. Maccari the Gret)

- + The art of medicine is not contrary to godliness; yet it should be used with the fear of God.

(Father Parsnovius)

“So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign” (13)

“They buried him in his own tomb, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and they laid him in the bed which was filled with spices and various ingredients prepared

in a mixture of ointments. They made a very great burning for him” (14)

According to some, Asa, with his stand against God, in his pride and arrogance he dug his own tomb, and planned an awesome funeral for himself. The people probably, remembering what he has previously done of godly achievements for so many years, cared to give him a very great burning with spices, which they practiced with great reverence; considering what he has done lately as human weaknesses and little faults.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 16

GRANT ME AN UPRIGHT HEART AND A HOLY WILL TO TRUST IN YOU AND TO CONQUOR BY YOU

- + The heart of the man of reform Asa king of Judah was shaken;
In his last days his heart was divided and he lost his uprightness;
He assumed that he could give an hour to God and an hour to the world;
His holy will got corrupted, and he lost the holiness of his mind;
He fell onto a series of sins;
And came to be a toy in the devil's hands.

- + Pride entered into him, and he thought of himself as wise;
He no longer sought the counsel of God; nor trust in Him;
He was slothful to sanctify the cities he took from Israel;
For the sake of gaining favor in the eyes of their inhabitants;
By that he lost God's support for himself;
God allowed for the king of Israel to come against him;
To provoke him to return to Him with repentance;
And to have back the holiness of his will and mind;
But he did not heed the voice of the temptation that dwelt upon him.

- + He robbed the silver and gold of the house of the Lord, and of the treasuries of his own house;
To seduce the king of Aram to break his treaty with his ally the king of Israel;
He temporarily succeeded in his human effort devoid of the grace of God;
The king of Israel collapsed before him for some time;
And Asa widened the territories of Judah, and built strongholds;

+ God sent to him the prophet Hanani to call him to repent;
But he grew more arrogant, insulted the prophet and put him in prison;
Some of his own people, attempting to advise him, he oppressed them as well;

He assumed that he had the ability, the wisdom, and the good judgment;
And nobody could confront him or question his decisions.

+ God allowed for him to go through the temptation of illness;
His malady got so severe to confine him to his bed;
But instead of returning to God with repentance;

He resorted to the magicians seeking cure;
Feeling that he was near death, he dug a tomb for himself;
He did not raise his heart to God to ask forgiveness;
But descended with his mind down to earth to prepare a place for his corpse.

+ Grant me, O Lord, a faithful and upright heart as that of David;
That perpetually sought You, and did Your pleasure;
Sanctify the mind You gave me;
Let it be perpetually preoccupied with You;
Sanctify my will by Your grace, to be in harmony with Your will;
Sanctify me completely, and let me lean on you in all my affairs;
Raise my thoughts up to Your heavens;
So as not to dig a tomb for myself, to contain the smell of my corruption.

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THE SPIRITUAL REFORM IN THE ERA OF JEHOSHAPHAT

(Chapters 17 to 20)

This section records for us the second period of reform; which was even greater than those of Asa.

Jehoshaphat meaning (Jehovah judges) was one of the favorite kings of the book of the chronicle; portrayed as a zealous king on the righteousness of God, sought His ways, and cared for keeping His commandments. Hence he was successful and honored in the eyes of the other nations. He cared for the peace and prosperity of his people (17: 2, 12-13).

Jehoshaphat the son of Asa has been a good tool in God's hand to work in the midst of His people; and one of the greatest reformers in Judah, together with Hezekiah and Josiah

Of his negative and positive reforms are:

- 1- He removed the high places and the wooden images from Judah (6)
- 2- He spread the teachings in all the cities of Judah (7-9), concentrating on the law of God (9)
- 3- He cared for fortifying the cities of Judah (12); and strengthening the army (13)
- 4- He cared for the justice in all the cities of Judah (19: 5-7)
- 5- He cared for the judgment concerning the Lord (19: 8-10)

CHAPTER 17

LIFE AND REIGN OF KING JEHOShAPHAT

All what came in this chapter did not come in the other books. Jehoshaphat was a partner in reigning during the three final years of his father Asa, whose feet were severely afflicted. During those years, he probably perceived the fault of his father's deed in putting the prophet who rebuked him in prison.

Jehoshaphat was one of the three prominent kings of Judah; and it could be said that he was the best king of Judah since the departure of king David. He was a good man, son of a good man. The grace ran in his royal blood at that time.

Blessed is the good father who begets a good son; And blessed is the good son from a good father; or let us say blessed is a kingdom on the throne of which sat two wise kings like Asa and his son Jehoshaphat.

1- Jehoshaphat sits on the throne, and establishes his kingdom

1 – 2, 5

2- The godly king Jehoshaphat keeps the commandment of God

3 – 4, 6

3- Jehoshaphat's cares for teaching and worshipping God

7 - 9

4- Jehoshaphat's impact upon the surrounding nations

1- - 11

5- Jehoshaphat's military might

12 – 19

1- JEHOShAPHAT SITS ON THE THRONE, AND ESTABLISHES HIS KINGDOM:

“Then Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place and strengthened himself against Israel” (1)

Once Jehoshaphat sat on the throne, he started by concentrating on keeping the corruption from infiltrating from Israel to Judah. On the military side, he cared for fortifying the cities, and the hand of the Lord was with him. The reason why he cared for this side was that Ahab king of Israel was a man of war who has been a king for three years, while Judah was passing through a condition of weakness and confusion in the last days of Asa's reign. The kingdom of Israel probably started to terrify Judah; which motivated Jehoshaphat to strengthen the army. Yet he was wise and prudent, and not a lover of shedding blood, particularly that of his brethren in Israel, the Northern kingdom; and, unlike his father, he did not seek an alliance with Aram against Israel.

It is good that he fortified his kingdom against any probable attack from the Northern kingdom; but what is better is that he also walked, since the beginning of his reign in the way of his good father, according to the mind of God, who established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah gave him presents.

Ahab king of Israel hastened to show friendship toward Judah, and sought to make alliance; yet on account of his corruption and perversion from faith in the living God, his friendship was more dangerous to Judah than the enmity of the adversary nations around.

“And he placed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had taken” (2)

2- THE GODLINESS OF JEHOShAPHAT AND KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD:

“Now the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David; he did not seek the Baals” (3)

In some versions it is said: "*He walked in the former ways of his father David*" which was not said except about few of the kings (1 kings 15: 3-11; 2 kings 14: 3; 16: 2; 18: 3). The life of David became a measuring rod for the kings of Judah. As to saying "*the former ways*", it refers to David's ways before his fall into the sin concerning Uriah the Hittite and his wife Bathsheba, which was a dark spot in his history (1 kings 15: 5). Yet, in the Septuagint version David was not mentioned; but just "*in the former ways of his father*", which, according to some most probably refers to his father Asa at the start of his reign, when he walked uprightly in the Lord.

"He did not seek the Baals", Each of the surrounding nations had its own Baal to worship; But Jehoshaphat had no relationship with the worship of Baal.

.
"But sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not according to the acts of Israel" (4)

Jehoshaphat, not only held fast to the worship of the living God of his father, but he walked as well in His commandments, and not like Israel that mixed between the worship of the living God and the pagan worship; and did not keep the divine commandment. That is why, despite keeping friendship with Israel, Jehoshaphat did not have a fellowship in its perverted worship, and its rejection of the divine commandment.

+ How can we do everything for the glory of God?

If we do everything according to the commandments of God; and we do not seek the commendation of men.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + It is not enough to keep the commandments, but we need to do that uprightly and diligently.

- + As the reward here, and the strength granted by the Spirit are greater and richer, our virtues should be greater as well. For He did not promise us a land that flows with milk and honey; nor comfort all our time, nor a multitude of children, nor the blessing of wheat, wine, sheep, and flocks; but promised us to have the heaven and the heavenlies, the adoption, the brotherhood of the only begotten Son, the fellowship of inheritance with Him, to be glorified with Him and to reign together with Him; and so forth of the uncountable rewards. As to our enjoyment of a greater reward, listen to what the apostle Paul say: *“There is therefore now, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8: 1-2)

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah gave presents to Jehoshaphat, and he had riches and honor in abundance” (5)

As Jehoshaphat sought the glory and righteousness of the Lord, together with godliness, God granted him riches and honor. The Lord Christ says: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6: 33; Luke 12: 31).

- + God’s kingdom and righteousness are the bread that we should seek and aim to in all our works; Yet, as we strive in this life as soldiers seeking the

kingdom of God, we also need the necessities of life; hence the Lord says: *“all these things shall be added to you”*; but, *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”*.

By saying *“first”*, he refers to our right to seek these things, but not *“first”*, For we should seek the kingdom of God as our ultimate goal; but the necessities of life we seek as necessities we need to be able to reach the goal we seek.

(St. Augustine)

“And his heart took delight in the ways of the Lord. Moreover he removed the high places and the wooden images from Judah” (6)

“His heart took delight in the ways of the Lord”. mean he raised his heart with faithfulness to God, that his behavior came to be in harmony with his worship of God; Raising the heart refers to joy and exultation of the heart with the Lord, His worship, and His ministry with every zeal and activity.

He was like Jacob who, seeing the ladder coming down from heaven, he set forth with diligence toward the land of the East (Genesis 29).

His heart was raised in the ways of God , that all the snares of the enemy would not be able to catch him, nor the difficulties to hinder his work. The wise Solomon says: *“He who observes the wind will not sow; and he who regards the clouds will not reap”* (Ecclesiastes 11: 4). Jehoshaphat walked with the spirit of challenge against the devil. His hosts, tricks, and plans; for he trusted in the Lord his God, who raised his heart from the dust, and granted him the spirit of strength.

On the positive aspect, he raised his heart and was strengthened; and on the negative aspect he removed the high places and the wooden images from Judah (6); about which it was written: *“What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it. The molded image is a teacher of lies, that the maker of its mold should trust in it, to make mute idols?”* (Habakkuk 2: 18)

By removing every trace of the pagan worship, he gave the chance to his leaders to teach in the cities of Judah, together with the Levites (7-8). He started by destroying the source of seduction and lies, to pave the way for the true teaching.

Jehoshaphat started by strengthening the army and fortifying the cities; then by raising his heart to work with diligence to remove the teachings of lies (the pagan worship); then followed up by sending the teachers of the truth, to help everyone to receive the divine light. But unfortunately, the people apostatized to the pagan practices; for the reforms did not touch their hearts and conscience.

3- JEHOSHAPHAT CARES FOR TEACHING AND WORSHIP OF GOD:

The book mentions here that he cared for strengthening the army, not only in Jerusalem but also in all the fortified cities of Judah. But, between the lines we see how Jehoshaphat wisely spent the first three years of his reign, or a little less, preparing another army, namely training the Levites and others, and encouraging them to teach; For he would not be able to send the leaders and the Levites to teach in the cities of Judah (7-9), without preparing civil and spiritual leaders. Jehoshaphat cared for teaching to be able to deal with his people, not through blind obedience without understanding, but through true knowledge. He did not intend to lead them blindfolded, to hinder his efforts of teaching and reform, but as rational creation, that recognize the truth, and increase in knowledge and wisdom.

As the Lord Christ chose twelve apostles and seventy disciples to minister and testify to the true gospel; it is likewise befitting of the church to follow the lead of her Groom, and plant the spirit of teaching and the true knowledge in the believers, under the leadership of His Holy Spirit.

“And in the third year of his reign he sent his leaders: Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethaneel, and Mechaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah” (7)

By joining the civil leadership with the Levites, Jehoshaphat intended to let the people perceive that the State laws conform to, and do not contradict with the divine commandment. In a commentary, the historian Josephus says: [Now in the third year of his reign, the king called the leaders and the Levites to go throughout the land to teach the people, a city after city, the law of Moses, to keep it, and to strive in worshipping God. That immensely pleased the multitude; who were now only preoccupied with keeping the divine law.

- + Being entrusted to preach the Lord Jesus Christ, it is befitting of me not to add to it or subtract from it; for it is committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior (Titus 1: 3). It is not within my authority to flee from it; either do it or be punished; which is obvious in saying: *“for necessity is laid upon me; yes, owe is me if I do not preach the gospel”* (1 Corinthians 9: 16). Frankly and openly before all, I proclaim that whoever is entrusted to lead the church, and get the honor of the position of a bishop, will be condemned if he does not teach the congregation what they should do. The laic is, however, not under such a commitment.

- + Meditate in how the Lord Christ proved His words by His deeds; saying: *“Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart”* (Matthew 11: 29). Teaching men to be poor, He proved it by his example; for: *“The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”* (Matthew 8: 20). And exhorting them to

love their enemies; He gave the example on the cross when He prayed for the sake of His crucifiers.

He said: *“If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also”* (Matthew 5: 40). Now, He did not only give away His clothes, but His blood as well. By such examples He instructed the others to teach; hence the apostle Paul says: *“Follow my example”* (Philippians 3: 17); for nothing is more lowly than to teach your philosophy only by words, which is the way of a hypocrite. Hence the apostles taught first by their behavior, then by their words. ... It is not wrong to talk about the passion of Christ as work; for by them He consummated a great and amazing work; He destroyed death, and presented to us many things He did for our sake,

- + Christ exhorts us to be like a lamp to give the light of teaching to others.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“And with them he sent Levites: Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah – the Levites; and with them Elishamah and Jehoram the priests” (8)

For the teaching to be integral, Jehoshaphat used three categories of teachers:

- 1- The priests to teach the divine law and commandments.
- 2- The Levites to teach the rites, the statutes, and the songs of praise.
- 3- The leaders to teach the civil laws, and to punish those who disregard them.

“So they taught in Judah, and had the Book of the Law of the Lord with them; they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught the people” (9)

Jehoshaphat did not stop at separating himself from evil, but had it in his heart to set what is good, which would not be possible to realize in the people's life without teaching them the Word of God and the law everywhere.. Teaching was of prominent importance to the priests and the Levites; for the worship and the offerings should be done with understanding, perception, and knowledge. Most probably, teaching was idle during the periods of spiritual weakness. The way Moses, representing teaching and Aaron representing worship worked together, it is befitting of us not to separate one from the other in all the generations

“They had the book of the law of the Lord with them”, so as not to teach according to the words of men.. The teachers spread allover the cities and villages of Judah, to confirm that the Word of God is the way of the sound reform. The Levites did not draw their authority to teach from being assigned by the king, but rather from the book of the law of the Lord (9); probably the book which was discovered in the temple in the days of king Josiah (2 Kings 22).

At the time after the return from captivity, Ezra the scribe cared for the teaching according to the law of God (Nehemiah 8).

The teaching was not confined to the rites of practicing the worship and praise, but extended to keeping the law as well.

In the second century AD we see how much the church cared to establish the rank of deacons to carry on the same role of the Levites, namely teaching.

+ By little verses the Holy Book plants the divine wisdom in everyone interested; and one verse presented to those who receive it, often becomes a source of ration enough for the whole life.

- + It is of great benefit to read the Holy Book; It gives wisdom to the soul, directs the spirit up to heaven, directs man to thanksgiving, annul the desire for earthly things, and lets our minds ponder continuously in the other world.

- + The Holy Book was given for this very purpose, to make man perfect by it; without which he would not be. According to the apostle Paul:: You have the Holy Books instead of me; if you wish to learn something read them. If that was what he instructed his disciple Timothy, who is filled of the Holy Spirit to do; How much more would we be?!

- + The seed of the gospel is the tiniest of all seeds; for although the disciples were more humble than anyone else, yet they bore a great power, that helped them to preach in the whole world.

- + A single word of the divine books may be more active than fire; It can smoothen the cruel hearts, and prepare them for every good work.

4- JEHOSHAPHAT'S IMPACT ON THE SURROUNDING NATIONS:

“And the fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat” (10)

As a result of his attachment to God, and keeping His Holy Word, God gave the king and all his country an awe (the awe of the Lord) before the surrounding nations; and the more prosperity, and honor God gave him, the more his heart was raised toward the way of the Lord.

“Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and silver as tribute and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand seven hundred rams, and seven thousand seven hundred male goats” (11)

The Philistines who were enemies to the Jews in the days of David changed their attitude, and sent presents and silver as a tribute to Jehoshaphat, and to gain his friendship; For *“When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even the enemies to be at peace with him”* (Proverb 16: 7).

5- JEHOSHAPHAT'S MILITARY MIGHT:

“So Jehoshaphat became increasingly powerful; and he built fortresses and storage cities in Judah” (12)

“He had much property in the cities of Judah; and the men of war, mighty men of valor, were in Jerusalem” (13)

“These are their numbers, according to their fathers’ houses: Of Judah, the captain, and with him three hundred thousand mighty men of valor” (14)

“And next to him was Jehohanan the captain, and with him two hundred and eighty thousand” (15)

“And next to him was Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself to the Lord, and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valor” (16)

He mentioned here five military leaders, three from Judah and two from Benjamin.

How beautiful and amazing, describing the leader ‘Amasiah the son of Zichri as *“willingly offered himself to the Lord”* (16); he was not only working under the king, but he counted himself as a (deputy) of the Lord to glorify Him by his position. He was the most prominent among all the military leaders in his care for worship. He accepted his leadership not for the sake of honor, authority, or benefit, but to glorify God, whom he served, together with his country, with good conscience. Amasiah offered nothing to the Lord, other than his soul and heart; according to the words of Solomon: *“My son, give Me your heart, and let your eyes observe My ways”* (Proverb 23: 26).

The most the Lord seeks from us is the heart. In the Old Testament He gave us the law engraved on stone; in the hope that our stony hearts would pick something up from the divine law; or that the law would leave its fingerprints on our hearts: *“I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts”* (Hebrews 8: 10); Hence the priest in the Holy Liturgy cries out, saying: [Lift up

your hearts], to which the congregation respond, saying: [We have them with the Lord].

+ Inside you, is either the knowledge of the truth or ignorance; gladness by having the virtue, or sorrow for having iniquity. By that we prepare our hearts, either for the kingdom of Christ, or for that of the devil.

(Father Moses)

+ If you do not give your soul, you will lose it. If someone intends to sell you something, he would say to you: 'Give me your gold', 'give me your silver', or 'give me your bronze'.

Now, listen to what love says to you, uttered through the mouth of wisdom, It says: "*My son, give me your heart*". ... What will give her? ... 'Your heart' ... Your heart was evil when it was with you, when you kept it for yourself; when you walked along the way of the evil desires of destructive kind of love.... Now, keep your heart far from all this.... Where will you draw it? Where will you put it?... Wisdom says: "*My son, give me your heart; make it mine, so as not to lose it.*"

(St. Augustine)

"Of Benjamin: Eliada a mighty man of valor, and with him two hundred thousand men armed with bow and shield" (17)

"And next to him was Jehozabad, and with him one hundred and eighty thousand prepared for war" (18)

Under those five, the number of warriors reached 1,160,000 mighty men of valor; a huge number compared to the area of Judah and Benjamin. The secret of the increase of their number almost to double what was in the days of Asa, was:

- a- God promised Abraham that his descendants will be as the stars in heaven and the sand of the sea
- b- There was a long period of peace during which no one was killed.
- c- With the great movement of reform, Jerusalem most probably increased considerably in area.
- d- Many have come from Israel to join the kingdom of Judah (15: 19).
- e- The main factor in the increase of the number was the blessing of the Lord that dwelt upon Jehoshaphat, that gave him success in everything he did.

“These served the king, besides those whom the king put in the fortified cities throughout all Judah” (19)

The soldiers most probably lived in their own cities and villages, doing their regular activities; and were called every now and then to have military training. The leaders served in the state affairs as personnel of the royal court, as secretaries of state or counselors of the king.

Finally, the secret of the awe of the army in the eyes of the surrounding nations was not the great number of warriors, but the awe given to them by God, together with success, progress, and grace in the eyes of all.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 17

YOU ARE, O LORD THE SECRET OF MY PROSPERITY

- + Let me be attached to You the way Jehoshaphat was;
To have Your hand with me, to walk in Your way, O Son of David;
By You, O King of kings, I shall feel the spirit of strength;
You set heroes out of the weak;
You will raise me up from the trash, and grant me authority
So that the hosts of darkness would have no place in me.

- + Whoever acquires You, O Lord, will be in need of nothing more;
You set Your kingdom in me;
To grant me of the flood of Your wisdom, riches, and honors;
You take away from inside me every idol I may worship;
And set me a holy temple for Yourself.

- + Jehoshaphst sent priests, Levites, and leaders;
To teach in Judah Your Holy commandments;
Open up my eyes to recognize Your secrets;
By Your Spirit, carry me to the banquet of Your commandments;
Let me delight in Your words; be satisfied with Your love, and have my
soul be filled with joy in You;
Your Holy Spirit engraves Your commandments in my heart;
Your Holy church trains me by the spirit of the truth;
You bring me forth into the deposit of heaven, to enlighten my soul.

- + You set out of my weakness an ambassador for You;
To testify to Your love, calling: 'Reconcile yourselves with God';
Set in my depths my fortified Jerusalem;
Train my energies, feelings, and senses;
Set out of them an army with banners;
Yes, You are the secret of my success;
Without You, my soul will collapse to dust;
By You, You give me fellowship with Your heavenly servants.

CHAPTER 18

AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN JEHOSHAPHAT AND AHAB KING OF ISRAEL

Almost all what came in this chapter, also came in 1 kings 22, except for the verses 1 to 3; yet the way the book of kings looks at things differs from that of the book of the chronicles. The former cares for the episode of the prophet Micaiah and king Ahab, while the latter cares for that of Micaiah and king Jehoshaphat, and mentions Ahab only by the way. For it was Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and not Ahab king of Israel, who cared for seeking the counsel of Micaiah (6-7). ... Some of the kings of Judah used to cherish the word of God from their whole hearts (See 12: 5-6; 15: 1-7; 16: 7-9; 19: 2-3; 20: 13-17; 24: 20; 25: 7-9; 15-16; 28: 9-11; 33: 10; 34: 22-28); contrary to the kings of Israel who did not care to worship the living God; but tended to oppress it.

Binding himself to Ahab the evil king of Israel, distorted the image of Jehoshaphat the good king of Judah; and brought on him many problems.

- 1- Jehoshaphat binds himself to Ahab the evil king of Israel
1
- 2- Jehoshaphat joins Ahab in his attempt to restore the city of Ramoth Gilead
2 - 3
- 3- Ahab seeks the counsel of false prophets
4 - 5
- 4- Jehoshaphat seeks the counsel of a prophet of the Lord
6 - 27

5- The Lord saves Jehoshaphat from death in the battle

28 - 31

6- Ahab, wounded in battle, and dies

32 – 34

1- JEHOSHAPHAT BINDS HIMSELF TO AHAB THE EVIL KING OF ISRAEL:

“Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab” (1)

The serious point of weakness in the life of Jehoshaphat was giving his son Jehoram in marriage to Attaliah the daughter of Ahab, whose biography reveals the danger to the godly to get attached to the evildoers. Ahab was an idol-worshipper, and an oppressor of the worship of the living God; who sold himself to evil doing. And Ahab's daughter was a mirror image of her mother the evil Isabel who killed the prophets, destroyed the altars of God, and spread the worship of Baal in Israel.

Jehoshaphat probably, falling into the trap of love of the honor and riches, intended to give his son in marriage to the daughter of Ahab king of Israel, who was rich and famous because of his conquests. It is wrong to set friendship on the fame of others, with the intention of getting fame for ourselves because of our friendship with them; or to love them based upon the love of others for them.

According to some, Jehoshaphat did that for political reasons; like his desire to unite the two kingdom together; or Ahab probably seduced him that he is going to make Jehoram his heir..... The union of the two kingdoms is something great; but it had to be based on a unity of faith and of the holy life. It was wrong from Jehoshaphat to say to Ahab: *“I am as you are; and my people as your people”* (3). It was befitting of him first to seek the holiness of the life of Ahab and his

people before joining him in war; It was a baseless friendship for which Jehoshaphat paid a high price..

What this book intends to confirm is that the serious fault committed by Asa, was his foolish alliance with Aram (Syria); while that of Jehoshaphat was giving his son in marriage to the daughter of Ahab, an oppressor of the divine truth. As a result of that relationship, the Phoenician paganism entered aggressively, with all its abominations into the kingdom of Judah; and because of that irresponsible fault, came a time when the whole seed of David was about to perish, if it was not for the priest Jehoiada who hid the little kid Joash in the storehouses of the temple for as long as six years, to deliver to him the throne of David when he reached seventeen years of age (22: 1-12). And Jehoshaphat himself was almost killed in the battle, probably through an evil plot by Ahab..

The Holy Book and the fathers of the church often warned us against the evil friendships. St. Augustine, at the beginning of his life, had a friendship with Hierius – one of the famous public speakers of Rome -- for the sake of his fame, with the intention of having a like fame.

+ What made me, O my God, present those books to Hierius, whom I loved even before I meet him, for the sake of his fame..

But can man love someone by merely hearing about him from someone commending him?

At that time, I loved those commended by men, and not by You. ... For I wished I am as famous as they were.

I confess to You that I loved that speaker, based on the love of those who commended him, more than my love for him for his own sake; and once they turned against him and reviled him, my love for him declined and I lost interest in him. Although the reasons for reviling him was not something new for him, he became to them as though another person; yet

what changed was not him, but the feelings of those who talked about him.

- + O my soul! Examine yourself and see whereto you are going in case you are driven out of your body; and who will be your companions, with whom you will be walking for inheritance? In case they are angels of light, how come that they did not shine on you by the ray of their beauty?!, and how come they did not rejoice in mixing with you before your departure?! ... But in case they are otherwise, woe to me for having their company that distances me from my Lord! Woe to me because I was deceived by them! Woe to me because I became a partner of the wicked by my own free will.

(The spiritual elder)

- + Do not corrupt the commandment of God for the sake of your friendship with anyone. Do not go back to the city where you sinned. Do not forsake worship, lest that would be a snare for, and offense to you.

(The blessed Abba Anthony)

- + Do not be disturbed to read that David counted peace as evil!; for in the gospeo you fing that there is a kind of peace rejected by Christ; who Himself says to His disciples: *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give you"* (John 14: 27). For there is peace that does not put a rock of offense, and another peace that does ... That is why the prophet says: *"Peace, when there is no peace"* (Ezekiel 13: 10). Let us therefore flee from the peace of the wicked, who plot against the innocent, and gather together to afflict the righteous (Wisdom 2: 12), they oppress the widow and crush her humility.

(St. Ambrose)

- + The intimate relationships and the close friendship will cause the soul a great harm; hence we have to flee from them... In monasticism, it is not allowed for a monk to have a close friend with whom he has a relationship that may annoy the other brethren.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

2- JEHOSHAPHAT JOINS AHAB IN HIS ATTEMPT TO RESTORE THE CITY OF RAMOTH GILEAD:

“After some years he went down to visit Ahab in Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him and the people who were with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth Gilead” (2)

In the seventeenth year of the reign of Jehoshaphat, less than eight years since his son married Athaliah daughter of Ahab, he went to visit Ahab in Samaria, who killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him and the people who were with him. In that, Jehoshaphat did not walk in his father David's way, who did not sit together with the wicked, according to his words in the psalm, saying: *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful”* (Psalm 1: 1); and, *“I have hated the congregation of evildoers, and will not sit with wicked”* (Psalm 26: 5); and *“do not eat of their delicacies”* (Psalm 141: 4).

Ahab held that banquet to flatter Jehoshaphat, and to persuade him to join him in his attempt to restore Ramoth Gilead from the king of Aram. Jehoshaphat made that visit as a jest of friendship with Ahab; but he did not have in his mind to make a political or military alliance against the king of Aram. Yet Ahab had his own plans.

- + *“I will not sit with the wicked”* (Psalm 26: 4)... To what does sitting refer? To that man would be one heart with those he sits with. If your heart is not there despite being with them, you are not sitting with them; but if your heart is there, you are sitting with them, even though you may be away from them in flesh.

(St. Augustine)

“So

Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah: ‘Will you go with me against Ramoth Gilead?’ And he answered him, ‘I am as you are, and my people as your

people; we will be with you in the war” (3)

Ahab’s military possibilities were down; while those of Aram increased. Jehoshaphat answered Ahab in haste, without counting the cost of having an alliance with a king who had no relationship with God, but who even perverted to pagan worship, and surrounded himself with a great crowd of prophets who worshipped the calves. At that time there were no prophet of the Lord in Israel, other than Micaiah the son of Imlah alone, who was hated by Ahab. It so seems that Elijah at that time had retreated to the wilderness.

3- SEEKING THE COUNSEL OF THE FALSE PROPHETS:

“And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel. ‘Please inquire for the word of the Lord today’” (4)

God granted peace to Jehoshaphat, but through binding himself to Ahab, he got involved in a war. It so seems that, being uncomfortable for his decision, he sought to inquire of the Lord about it.

In (1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 20) it came that Jehoshaphat entered later into a commercial alliance with Ahaziah the son of Ahab who replaced his father on the throne of Israel. They sent together ships to Tarshish, for wheat and gold; but the ships were destroyed and the goods were lost; for God would not bless such an alliance.

It was good that Jehoshaphat inquired from God concerning entering into the battle; but, unfortunately he did not inquire from Him concerning giving his son in marriage to the daughter of Ahab, nor concerning going down to Samaria to visit him..

“Then the kings of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred men, and said to them, ‘Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?’. And they said, ‘Go up, for God will deliver it into the king’s hand’” (5)

4- JEHOSEPHAT SEEKS THE COUNSEL OF A PROPHET OF THE LORD:

“But Jehoshaphat said, ‘Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of him?’” (6)

I wonder how Jehoshaphat, the man attached to the Lord, felt when he sought to inquire from the Lord, and Ahab brought to him four hundred prophets, no one

among them a prophet of the Lord? All were false prophets who work to the account of the devil. He surely had a bitter soul, saying to Ahab: *"Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire from him?"*.

He should have refused to remain in that sitting that was to the account of the devil; where the lord had no place..

In every era there were false prophets who opposed the divine truth to the account of the devil. The Lord Christ says: *"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many"* (Matthew 24: 11); *"For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect"* (Matthew 24: 20; Mark 13: 22); against whom the prophets and the apostles warn us, saying: *"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who brought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction"* (2 Peter 2: 1); *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God , because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 John 4: 1); *"The prophets prophesy falsely; and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?"* (Jeremiah 5: 31); *"Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not be in this land' – 'By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed"* (Jeremiah 14: 15)

- + Then the devil shall be loosened , and work with all his might against Christ ... deceiving the dead senses with fantasies; and appear doing works he actually did not do; or he will probably perform wonders to deceive men away from the truth; assuming they are divine power.

(St. Augustine)

“So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘There is still one man by whom we inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he never prophesies good concerning me, but

always evil. He is Micaiah the son of Imla’. And Jehoshaphat said, ‘Let not the king say such things!’” (7)

“Then the king of Israel called one of his officers and said, ‘Bring Micaiah the son of Imla quickly!’” (8)

“And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah, clothed in their robes, sat each on his throne; and they sat at a threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of

Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them” (9)

The two king sat on their thrones at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; where Ahab looked into some of the important cases. The kings of the East at that time used to sit on makeshift thrones which they took wherever they went.

Those who sit with the scornful, will most probably fall into many faults, among which is not caring for their duties.

Jehoshaphat sat with his royal robe, listening patiently to the lies of the false prophets who claimed to speak in the name of God; he probably had a slight guilty conscience in him, for feeling hatred toward those false prophets (7); But he did not dare to chasten the false prophet who insulted and struck the true prophet on the cheek; and did not object against putting him in prison.

Ahab used to listen to his prophets commending him with their flattering words; and refused to encounter the true prophet, on account of that he always faithfully warned him against faults. Here appears the danger of being surrounded by the flatterers, like those false prophets, with their smooth talk, that give false hope.

“Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made horns of iron for himself; and he said, ‘Thus says the Lord: With these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed’” (10)

The horns in the Holy Book were a symbol of power; and referred to sure conquest over the enemies (See Deuteronomy 33: 17; Psalm 44: 5; Daniel 8: 4). As to saying: *“Thus says the Lord”* (10), Zedekiah, a priest of Baal intended by the spirit of lies, to proclaim that he is sent from the true Lord. As to saying: *“With these you will gore the Syrians”*; is on account of that the priests of the idols did not just utter what they claim their gods tell them to do, but they personally had the power and the authority to do what they personally want; and even to provoke their gods to do as they want.

“And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, ‘Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the king’s hands’” (11)

“Then the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying: ‘Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Therefore, please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement’” (12)

The messenger advised the prophet Micaiah to talk to the king the way the false prophets did, but Micaiah rejected his advice counting it evil and vain.

“And Micaiah said, ‘As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak’” (13)

“Then he came to the king, and the king said to him, ‘Micaiah, Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain? And he said: ‘Go and prosper; and they shall be delivered into your hand’” (14)

This was not the first time that Ahab had to call Micaiah to inquire from him; not that he expected him to respond positively, but with some hope to hear from him what the false prophets said; probably to convince those around him that those false prophets are saying the truth. Micaiah used to answer with what the king wished to hear, yet in a way that bore some kind of ridicule and despise of the intentions of the king to hear him say, not according to the will of God but to his own will.

“So the king said to him, ‘How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth, in the name of the Lord?’” (15)

The king knew for sure that once he makes the prophet swear to tell him nothing but the truth, in the name of the Lord; that the prophet is committed to change his scoffing response, and utter what the Lord truly tells him.

“Then he said, ‘I saw all Israel scattered on the mountain, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, ‘These have no master. Let each return to his in peace’” (16)

The king perceived the meaning behind that proverb; according to the prophet Moses prayer, when he asked the Lord to appoint a good leader for the people, saying: *“who may go out before them, and go in before them; who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd”* (Numbers 27: 17)

“And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘Did not I tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?’ ”(17)

Ahab intended to portray before Jehoshaphat that what Micaiah utters is not from God, but out of hatred that the prophet had against the king; hence his view was contrary to the unanimous view of the four hundred prophets.

“Then Micaiah said, ‘Therefore, hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right hand and on His left’ (18)

The prophet David often talked about the Lord sitting on His throne in heaven (Psalm 9: 7; 11: 14; 45: 6; 103: 19); And the Almighty appeared sitting on His throne, in a vision granted to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6); to Daniel (Daniel 7: 9); to Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1: 26), to Steven the martyr (Acts 7: 56); and to John the Evangelist (Revelation 4: 2).

“And the Lord said, ‘Who will persuade Ahab king of Israel to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead? And one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner’” (19)

“Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, and said: ‘I will persuade him’. The Lord said to him, ‘In what way?’” (20);

In the ‘Tergom’ there is a strange view that the spirit of Naboth the Jezreelite (ss 1 kings 21) came forward from the dwelling places of the righteous and stood before the Lord, and said: *“I will persuade him”*, and when the Lord asked him: *“In what way?”*, he answered: *“I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of his prophets; And the Lord said to him: “Go out and do so” . But to take authority to deceive, you will no more have the right to sit among the righteous; because whoever tells lies will not have the right to sit among the righteous. Therefore go away from me and do so.*

“So he said, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all His prophets’”. And the Lord said, ‘You shall persuade him, and also prevail; go out and do so’ (21)

Because Ahab was comfortable with the counsel of the false prophets, hence God allowed for him to be deceived and seduced by a lying spirit.

Some may wonder how could be in heaven someone who says: *“I will go out and be a lying spirit”*. Yet the visions concerning heaven should not be interpreted in a literal way, because they are more like a proverb or unutterable proclamation; presented to men in a way that suits the human language or mind.

“Now therefore, look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against You” (22)

“Then Zedekiah the son of Chenanaah went near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, ‘Which way did the Spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?’” (23)

Micaiah most probably had his hands tied when he was brought out of prison. He was struck on his face or cheek by Zedekiah to put him to shame.

“And Micaiah said, ‘Indeed you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide’” (24)

Micaiah did not answer Zedekiah directly, but addressed all those present, saying: When the news of the death of king Ahab reach Samaria, all the counselors of the king and the false prophets will hide; and Zedekiah will flee to hide in one place or other; for fear that Ahaziah the son of Ahab, or queen Isabel would take revenge against him, once they realize that I am (Micaiah) a true prophet of the Lord.

“Then the king of Israel said, ‘Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king’s son’” (25)

The king commanded to return Micaiah to the public prison from which he was brought, under Amon the governor of Samaria.

“And say, ‘Thus says the king, Put this fellow to prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction, until I return in peace’” (26)

By that the king intended to confirm to Jehoshaphat and all those present that he does not believe what Micaiah said; hence he commanded to feed him in orison with the food and the drink of affliction or of sorrow.

“Then Micaiah said, ‘If you ever return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me’, and he said, ‘Take heed all you people’” (27)

It is always difficult for the faithful counselors, who are often hated and persecuted, because of their faithfulness to the Lord their God. But in due time, God reveals who are His faithful servants, and who are the deceivers and the liars.

By putting on his royal robe during the battle, Jehoshaphat was almost killed. But God saved him from the evil counsel of Ahab who pretended to be his faithful friend. According to some the later gave it with the intention to let Jehoshaphat be killed in battle, by making him obvious with his royal attire before the enemy; and by that he would have the upper hand on Jehoram, Jehoshaphat’s son, and his son-in-law. But God allowed for Ahab to fall into the pit he dug for his friend. Being disguised as a regular soldier, he was killed by an unknown enemy.

5- THE LORD SAVES JEHOSHAPHAT FROM DEATH IN THE BATTLE:

“So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead” (28)

It was befitting of Jehoshaphat, after hearing what the prophet Micaiah said, to refrain from going to the battle, but unfortunately, although the prophet proclaimed the will of God, Jehoshaphat, motivated by emotion, persisted on supporting him in battle, probably feeling that it would be unethical and unmanly to fail him in his time of need.

“And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes’. So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle” (29)

Most probably Ahab heard what Ben-Hadad, king of Syria commanded his leaders to do, namely to concentrate the whole battle on the person of Ahab (1 Kings 22: 31)

“Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots who were with him, saying, ‘Fight with no one, small or great, but only with the king of Israel” (30)

“so it was, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, ‘It is the king of Israel’. Therefore they surrounded him to attack; but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the

Lord helped him, and God moved them to turn away from him” (31)

According to the ‘Targom’, Jehoshaphat, finding himself in such a serious situation, he cried out seeking the help from his own men; then the Syrian captains of the charioteers, hearing him cry out, realized that it was Jehoshaphat

and not Ahab; and they turned back from pursuing him. The Lord allowed it to save Jehoshaphat despite not listening to what Micaiah prophesied.

Jehoshaphat assumed that entering into a relationship of marriage with Ahab, the evil king of Israel, the latter would support him and increase his power. He sacrificed his fellowship with God for the sake of political and diplomatic reasons; and was almost killed. Yet God, looking at his faithful past, saved him from death

7- AHAB WOUNDED IN BATTLE AND DIED:

“For so it was, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him”
(32)

“Then a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of the armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, ‘Turn around and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded’” (33)

According to the ‘Targom’, it was Naaman the great leader of the king of Syria, who drew a bow, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of the armor – between the heart and the liver (to realize the prophecies of Elijah and Micaiah)

“The battle increased that day, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot facing the Syrians until evening; and about the time of sunset he died” (34)

What happened was a lesson to Israel as well as to Judah, that there is no salvation except by a fellowship with God and trust in Him, by not plunging in defilement and corruption, and by not being attached to the wicked.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 18

A CORRUOT AND AN EVIL ALLIANCE

- + Nothing would give pleasure to God like love, unity, and alliance;
He came down to take away from us everything foreign to love;
He was raised by the cross, so that by the vertical tree the heaven would be allied to the earth;
And by the horizontal tree humanity would be allied together.

- + Jehoshaphat got in a relation of marriage with the evil Ahab;
By which he set a corrupt alliance;
For what communion would be between God and Belial?;
And what fellowship would be between light and darkness?

- + How could Jehoshaphat, the man of God, endure such a bond with Ahab?
When with them assembled four hundred false prophets;
Who talked in the name of the Lord, while being the servants and soldiers of the devil;
They pretended to deliver a counsel in the name of the Lord;
They uttered smooth words, and confirmed the conquest on Aram;
By that they almost caused the destruction of the two kingdoms.

- + Micaiah the seer proclaimed their deception and lies;
But Ahab's corruption corrupted the insight if Jehoshaphat;
Ahab was killed in disgrace;
And Jehoshaphat almost perished together with his people.

- + Grant me, O my God. the spirit of strength and discernment;
To reject any alliance with evil and darkness;

To attach myself to You, O Light of the world;
So that the darkness would never crawl into my heart and mind;
To enjoy the fellowship with Your saintly fiery servants;
To get attached to the truth, that vanity would have no place in me.

+ I desire the salvation of the whole world;
Let me be crucified together with You, to live in and by You;
I shall judge no one, and I shall despise nobody;
Yet, I shall never partake of the works of darkness;
Grant me, together with the simplicity, the spirit of wisdom and

discernment;

Let me be compassionate on the weak, as though I am weak like him to
give him comfort;

But not to go down into weakness together with him.

+ Hold me fast in You, O my God, the true Light;
By You I shall be enlightened, and carry You to every heart;
Let me not savor the corruption of the darkness;
But exult in Your light, and enjoy union with you.

+ When shall I see the whole world attached to You?
When shall I see the earth be a new heaven by You?
When shall I see humanity become like angels by You?
Glory be to You, O Savior of the world; Lover of mankind.

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CHAPTER 19

A RETURN TO JERUSALEM

What came in this chapter did not come in the other books; including Jehoshaphat's encounter with Jehu the prophet (1-3), and his judiciary reforms, beside teaching the law of the Lord by the Levites, under the supervision of the high priest.

The second book of the chronicles did not mention Jehoshaphat's persistence on unfaithfulness; that after his alliance with Ahab against Aram, he did the same by uniting with Jehoram the son of Ahab against Moab (2 Kings 3).

Yet with his faithful heart, Jehoshaphat sought the counsel of the Lord after walking according to his own will in his alliance with Ahab, and entering with him into a relation of marriage without seeking the Lord's counsel.

The wrath of the Lord came upon Jehoshaphat, but in his love for his people he did not wish the same for them; which remind us of David's words at the threshing floor of Arona the Jebusite (1 Chronicles 21: 17)

1- Jehoshaphat's safe return to Jerusalem

1

2- Jehoshaphat rebuked by the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani on his alliance with Ahab

2 - 3

3- Jehoshaphat's care to reform the kingdom

4

4- Jehoshaphat instructs the judges, he appointed for the minor courts of justice

5 - 7

5- Jehoshaphat instructs the judges he appointed for the major courts of justice

8 – 11

1- JEHOSEPHATH'S SAFE RETURN TO JERUSALEM:

“Then Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem” (1)

If Jehoshaphat did wrong by entering with the evil Ahab into a relationship of marriage, and making an alliance with him, the Lord chastened him, and he almost got killed in battle. But God had compassion on him and brought him back safely to Jerusalem. He got more than he expected for the sake of the purity of his heart, his true longing to be attached to God, and his strife for the salvation of his people.

It is therefore befitting of us, despite our weakness, to desire to encounter God and to seek from Him to make sin bitter in our mouths by His chastisements, meant for our salvation and our glory, to bring our hearts up to the higher Jerusalem in true peace, to practice the deposit of heaven.

Who can describe the feelings of Jehoshaphat on returning to Jerusalem the city of God, which he counted as his own city and home?

God desires to set out of your depths, not only a heavenly paradise, but a holy city, and a temple for Himself, to make your depths a new Jerusalem, with a temple, not the work of human hand, but of His own hands.

In all eras, a visit to Jerusalem and the holy land, where the Lord Christ walked and consummated His salvation work, has been always the heart desire of the believers. But St. Jerome, although not lessening the holiness of the holy locations, yet he set forth with our sight toward our inner Jerusalem.

+ Reaching the heavenly palace is easier than reaching Britain or Jerusalem, for the kingdom of God is inside you.

St. Anthony and the hosts of the monks of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Pontus, Capadocia, and Armenia, did not look toward Jerusalem, but before them the door to Paradise was opened.

The blessed Hilarion, although a citizen of Palestine, did not look toward Jerusalem longer than a single day; when being close to the holy locations, he did not wish to disregard them; But at the same time he did not intend to confine God within local limits.

+ Although this earthly temple was the image of the heavenly temple, yet *“one star differs from another star in glory”* (1 Corinthians 15: 41, 42). Blessed is he who is worthy to stand on the fifteenth step in the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem; for that exalted location is the place of the apostles and the martyrs.

Let us therefore pray to be worthy of standing just on the lowest step of the temple of the Lord.

They stand upon the different steps of the temple to sing together in harmony and unity, one psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord.

The steps are different, but the praise (glorifying) of God is the same.

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When your gates are opened, and you look here and there, you will seek Him, but you will not find Him (Songs 3: 2). You will then have your tears on your cheeks.
Guard your gates carefully, lest what has dwelt on you before will happen again (See John 19: 17); Otherwise, you will yourself fall into the hands of the adversaries.

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Unfortunately, Jehoshaphat did not cut off his relationship with Ahab and his household, on whom the two books of the kings revealed to us what dwelt .

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monk with experience and knowledge in a different way than the one who seeks to become a monk ; the sick different from the one with sound health. ... Who can understand all those judgments except the Creator of everything, and who knows everything?

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forth to all the land under his authority to teach the people the statutes given by God to the prophet Moses, and the worship that should be given to God.

“So Jehoshaphat dwelt in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, and brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers” (4)

Having got in touch with God’s compassion on him despite his faults, he readily received the rebuke; did not protest nor resisted God as his father did; but counted the Lord’s chastisement and rebuke as a kind of divine mercy. Hence he returned to Jerusalem, and went out again among the people to bring them back to the Lord God of their fathers. On him the words of Solomon apply, saying: *“Rebuke a wise man, and he will be still wiser”* (Proverb 9: 8, 9). Beside instructing the priests, the Levites, and the leaders to teach the people, he went out himself to make sure that justice is practically applied everywhere.; As it probably caused offense to the people to see their king get into a relationship of marriage with the evil king Ahab, and some, as a result perverted to idol-worship, that is why Jehoshaphat put in his heart to double his efforts to return them to the Lord God of their fathers; and he set forth from the far South to the far North, from Beersheba in the South to the mountains of Ephraim in the North; counting it as an atonement for his unfortunate visit to Ahab. It is likewise befitting of us, in case we cause an offense to others, to do our best to mend our fault.

- + He exhorts us not to stop at raising prayers, without positively contributing with something on our side. ... Notice how he shows his own role, namely his hope, the source of every goodness; according to the prophet: *“Let Your mercy, O Lord be upon us, just as we hope in You”* (Psalm 33: 22); and, *“Consider the generations of old and see, has anyone trusted in the Lord and was disappointed?”* (Sirach 2: 10); and as Paul says *“Hope does*

not disappoint" (Romans 5: 5). ... Do you see the greatness of hope of Paul in God; saying that whatever happen he shall never be disappointed; ; They will never prevail on me; but the Lord Christ will always be glorified in my body. Yes, they expected to bring Paul into their snare, to quench the fire of his preaching the gospel, but to no avail.

4- JEHOSHAPHAT'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THE JUDGES HE APPOINTED FOR THE LOWER COURTS OF JUSTICE:

“Then he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city” (5)

Beside the priests, the Levites, and the leaders to teach the people, Jehoshaphat previously sent (17: 7-9), Now he sends judges and set steady courts in the small cities, villages, in Jerusalem and the major cities, with the goal of supervising the execution of the statutes the people have learned; and to rein the evildoers.

There might have been judges before, but on account of that they probably did their duties slothfully, or were despised by the people; Jehoshaphat set a new judiciary system, with the following new responsibilities:

- a- Keeping the people in the worship of God
- b- Punishing those who break the law and statutes.
- c- Solving the controversies among the people.

“And said to the judges: ‘Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment’ (6)

The king warned the judges against performing their duties according to their own tendencies, and not according to the Lord; saying: *“Take heed in what you are doing, for you do not judge for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment” (6)*. He sought from them to walk by the spirit of godliness, saying: *“Let the fear of the Lord be put upon you; for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, partiality, nor taking bribes”*. He sought from them to commit themselves to faithfulness, for the following reasons:

- a- They do not judge for man but for the Lord; they are His servants (6)
- b- The eyes of the Lord are upon them; and He is with them in the judgment (6)

- c- God is their leader, their role model in justice; in whom there is no iniquity, partiality, nor taking bribes (7)
- d- Any fault they may commit will be counted as against the Lord Himself (10)

“Now, therefore, let the fear of the Lord be put upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor partiality, nor taking of bribes” (7)

Jehoshaphat experienced how to deal with God: Whoever honors The Lord, he will be honored by the Lord; Whoever fears Him, He will give him awe before the others; and whoever lends the Lord through the poor, He will pay him back double as much as he gave. By such a principle he instructed the judges to walk with awe, not through the use of the human authority, and issuing orders, but , having the fear of God, the awe of God will dwell upon them. ... In his talk to the judges, Jehoshaphat reveals his heart filled with love, faithfulness, and fear of the Lord.

- + The fear of the Lord includes all those requirements (for the continuous joy). For whoever fears the Lord as is befitting, and trusts in Him, will collect all the sources of happiness, and will acquire the perfect fountain of gladness. As a drop of water that falls on a wide open ocean will soon disappear; it will also be with whoever fears God, his fear will be scattered and disappear in the huge ocean of the Lord's joy. It is really amazing; for together with the causes for man to have sorrow, we find him exultant. For whatever sorrow he may have, its bitterness will be nothing to him compared to his enjoyment of the perpetual joy

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Because Cain did not fear God by his own will, the fear of God came upon him against his will. He became a fugitive and a wanderer in terror on the face of the earth.

6- JEHOSHAPHAT'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THE JUDGES HE APPOINTED FOR THE HIGHER COURTS OF JUSTICE:

“Moreover in Jerusalem, for the judgment of the Lord and for controversies, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests, and some of the chief fathers of Israel, when they returned to Jerusalem” (8)

The king set a supreme court in Jerusalem the capital, to look into the major issues, or into the appeal of anyone who feels that a lower court has misjudged him.; He set it in Jerusalem to be able to intervene by himself in any serious case.

Here the king discerns between “the judgment of the Lord”, and “the controversies”. By the former he probably means the cases concerning the law of God; while by the later he means cases concerning the controversies between men.

“And commanded them, saying, ‘Thus you shall act in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a loyal heart” (9)

Together with his care for justice to prevail upon his whole kingdom, and for lifting up any oppression or partiality; Jehoshaphat, in his talk to the judges, concentrated on godliness, faithfulness, and the purity of heart.

Despite falling, himself, in serious weaknesses, like entering into a relation of marriage with Ahab the evil king of Israel; yet his actions and talk to the judges reveal the exaltation of his spiritual life, the uprightness of his concepts, and the purity of his heart.

+ It is not the defilement of the body that offends the Lord, as much as the defilement of the soul;. By saying: “*Blessed are the pure*”, he means “*the pure in heart, who will see God*” (Matthew 5: 8). The prophet also says:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51: 10); and, *“Wash my heart from wickedness”* (Jeremiah 4: 14)

- + I see many beat their breast (Luke 23: 48), saying: [We sinned]; assuming that their hearts utter it together with their tongues; but to them and the like I say: Not everyone who says [I sinned, I sinned], will be forgiven; according to the words of the Lord: *“Not everyone who says to me: Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven”* (Matthew 7: 21)

In the Holy Book I see how Judas the betrayer said before the priests and the elders of the Jews; *“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”* (Matthew 27: 4); how it was also said by king Saul before the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 15: 24-34); and how it was said by king David before the prophet Nathan; Yet only one of those heard the response of forgiveness, namely David (2 Samuel 12: 13); because he said it truly from the heart (Psalm 51: 1); and he was steadfast in his prayers as is obvious in his book of psalms.

- + *“Blessed the pure in heart for they shall see God”* (Matthew 5: 8). Notice how the reward is spiritual; He calls those who reach the climax of virtues, and who have no evil in their hearts; who control themselves; and keep away from evil desires, *“the pure in heart”*; For the apostle Paul also says: *“Pursue peace with all men, and holiness without which no one will see the Lord”* Hebrew 12: 14).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Do not make your mouth ready but your heart ... What we miss is not what we see but what we believe; we therefore seek, not what touch our

outer senses; nor say: [Let those who saw the Lord by their eyes and touched Him by their hands after His resurrection, believe; but concerning us who did not see nor touched Him, why should we believe?]

- + Change the heart, for then you may change the works. Uproot the evil desires, and plant the love. For “as *the desire (for money) is the root of all kinds of evil*” (1 Timothy 6: 10); So is love, the root of all goodness.

(St. Augustine)

- + The heart of man is not a small thing; for it can accommodate all that.

(The scholar Origen)

“whatever case comes to you from your brethren who dwell in their cities, whether of bloodshed or of offences against law or commandment, against statutes or ordinances, you shall warn them, lest they trespass against the Lord, and wrath come upon you and your brethren. Do this and you will not be guilty” (10)

He gave special care for judging the cases of murder, namely shedding blood, for their seriousness; and for whoever sheds the blood of his brother in humanity will be as though he has done wrong to the heart of His Creator, the lover of mankind.

God does not endure to see the blood of the innocent shed without guilt; saying to Cain: “*The voice of your brother’s blood cries out from the earth*” (Genesis 4: 11); He does not endure even shedding the blood of the wicked; saying:

“Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance” And the Lord put a mark on cane, so that no one who came upon him would kill him” (Genesis 4: 14-15). God’s hatred for blood shedding is apparent in saying to David, His beloved prophet: “You have shed much blood, and have made great wars, you shall not build a house for my name” (1 Chronicles 22: 8)

In the statute of the cities of refuge (Numbers 25: 29 -34), God intended to protect whoever causes the death of someone unintentionally. But that does not imply any leniency with the crime of murder; He therefore made the following conditions for it:

- a- The charge of murder is not to be confirmed by the testimony of one witness, but by that of more than one; and its punishment is death.
- b- It is not possible for a confirmed murderer to pay a ransom on his soul; lest the rich would assume that by his money he can kill and pay ransom. But if he who kills will be put to death.
- c- Slothfulness in punishing the murderer is counted as defilement of the land on which he dwells; in the midst of which the Lord dwells.

*“And take notice: Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord, and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king’s matters;
also the Levites will be officials before you. Behave courageously, and the Lord will be with the good” (11)*

He set the chief priest to reside over the supreme court; most probably for issues concerning the religious statutes and worship; and the (prime minister) for those concerning the things of the king (the civil cases).

Of the beautiful features of the personality of Jehoshaphat was strengthening and encouraging the souls to work by the spirit of courage and hope in the good

Lord who works in and by men. He learned it from God Himself who said to Joshua: *“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go”* (Joshua 1: 9).. And with the same spirit He said to Jeremiah: *“Do not say I am a youth; for you shall go to all to whom I send you; Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you;They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you”* (Jeremiah 1: 7, 8, 19). The more the servant hides in God, he will feel safe and fear no one else; and according to St. John El-Dargi: [Whoever become a servant of God, only fears his Master; but whoever has no fear of his Master, will most probably fears his own shadow].

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 19

BRING ME BACK, O LORD, TO THE HIGHER JERUSALEM

- + How exultant was Jehoshaphat’s soul when he returned to Your holy city;
He counted Your city Jerusalem as his own home where he finds comfort;
For he would not find comfort except in Your bosom;
Foolishly, he entered into a relationship of marriage with the evil Ahab;
I wonder if he was impressed by his conquests, or wished for the union of the two kingdoms;
His friendship with the evil man almost had him killed; If not for his simple soul and pure heart, that rescued him;
And he returned safe to Jerusalem.

- + For the sake of Your love for him, and for the sake of his salvation,
You sent to him the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani to rebuke him;
In humility he listened to him, for he is a man of God;

- He did his best to remove the wooden images from the land;
And he delivered his heart to You to prepare it, to seek You.
- + He set judges, not to execute his commands;
but to judge for You, and not for any man;
He called them to have Your holy fear;
To enjoy Your awe over them;
He exhorted them to imitate You, O amazing in Your righteousness;
He warned them against oppressing anybody, being partial, or to receive
bribes.
- + He exhorted them to walk with godliness, faithfulness, and the perfection
of heart.
For then You would work in and by them; and Your fear would prevail
among the people;
He strongly commanded them to keep Your law;
And to obey Your commandment;
And warned them against iniquity and disobedience.
- + As You have strengthened Joshua and told him not to fear anyone;
And proclaimed Your company with him wherever he goes;
So did Jehoshaphat, he strengthened those working with him;
He confirmed to them that You long to accompany them. O Good
Shepherd.
- + Grant me, O Lord the pure heart of David and Jehoshaphat;
To let Your Spirit work in me , to desire for all to be leaders;
To fill my heart with hope, joy, and peace;
And present from what is Yours to my brethren.
- + Amazing are Your works, O my Lord;

Out of sinners, You set saints;
And from the weak, mighty men of valor;
And You lifted them up from the trash heap, to sit together with the elites
of Your people;

+ Glory be to You, who works in all generations;
To set a remnant to testify to You;
And ambassadors who walk with Your Holy Spirit;
Glory be to You, for returning Jehoshaphat safe to Jerusalem;
Grant my heart to return pure to Your High Jerusalem.



CHAPTER 19

A RETURN TO JERUSALEM

What came in this chapter did not come in the other books; including Jehoshaphat's encounter with Jehu the prophet (1-3), and his judiciary reforms, beside teaching the law of the Lord by the Levites, under the supervision of the high priest.

The second book of the chronicles did not mention Jehoshaphat's persistence on unfaithfulness; that after his alliance with Ahab against Aram, he did the same by uniting with Jehoram the son of Ahab against Moab (2 Kings 3).

Yet with his faithful heart, Jehoshaphat sought the counsel of the Lord after walking according to his own will in his alliance with Ahab, and entering with him into a relation of marriage without seeking the Lord's counsel.

The wrath of the Lord came upon Jehoshaphat, but in his love for his people he did not wish the same for them; which remind us of David's words at the threshing floor of Arona the Jebusite (1 Chronicles 21: 17)

1- Jehoshaphat's safe return to Jerusalem

1

2- Jehoshaphat rebuked by the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani on his alliance with Ahab

2 - 3

3- Jehoshaphat's care to reform the kingdom

4

4- Jehoshaphat instructs the judges, he appointed for the minor courts of justice

5 - 7

5- Jehoshaphat instructs the judges he appointed for the major courts of justice

8 – 11

1- JEHOSHAPHAT'S SAFE RETURN TO JERUSALEM:

“Then Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem” (1)

If Jehoshaphat did wrong by entering with the evil Ahab into a relationship of marriage, and making an alliance with him, the Lord chastened him, and he almost got killed in battle. But God had compassion on him and brought him back safely to Jerusalem. He got more than he expected for the sake of the purity of his heart, his true longing to be attached to God, and his strife for the salvation of his people.

It is therefore befitting of us, despite our weakness, to desire to encounter God and to seek from Him to make sin bitter in our mouths by His chastisements, meant for our salvation and our glory, to bring our hearts up to the higher Jerusalem in true peace, to practice the deposit of heaven.

Who can describe the feelings of Jehoshaphat on returning to Jerusalem the city of God, which he counted as his own city and home?

God desires to set out of your depths, not only a heavenly paradise, but a holy city, and a temple for Himself, to make your depths a new Jerusalem, with a temple, not the work of human hand, but of His own hands.

In all eras, a visit to Jerusalem and the holy land, where the Lord Christ walked and consummated His salvation work, has been always the heart desire of the believers. But St. Jerome, although not lessening the holiness of the holy locations, yet he set forth with our sight toward our inner Jerusalem.

+ Reaching the heavenly palace is easier than reaching Britain or Jerusalem, for the kingdom of God is inside you.

St. Anthony and the hosts of the monks of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Pontus, Capadocia, and Armenia, did not look toward Jerusalem, but before them the door to Paradise was opened.

The blessed Hilarion, although a citizen of Palestine, did not look toward Jerusalem longer than a single day; when being close to the holy locations, he did not wish to disregard them; But at the same time he did not intend to confine God within local limits.

+ Although this earthly temple was the image of the heavenly temple, yet *“one star differs from another star in glory”* (1 Corinthians 15: 41, 42). Blessed is he who is worthy to stand on the fifteenth step in the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem; for that exalted location is the place of the apostles and the martyrs.

Let us therefore pray to be worthy of standing just on the lowest step of the temple of the Lord.

They stand upon the different steps of the temple to sing together in harmony and unity, one psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord.

The steps are different, but the praise (glorifying) of God is the same.

This is concerning the heavenly Jerusalem, but as for us, I believe, we are present in this world to be chastised every day of our life.

If one of us is on the first step, let him be encouraged to reach the second step. And if another is on the second step, let him not lose hope to reach the third one.

Blessed are the martyrs who were found worthy of climbing to the highest step on the top itself; We, however, living in this world, cannot climb all the steps at once from the lowest to the highest. Yet it is befitting of us not to stop at the lowest step, but strive to reach the highest one

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- + Close your gates, O Jerusalem, Let Your Groom stay inside you;
When your gates are opened, and you look here and there, you will seek Him, but you will not find Him (Songs 3: 2). You will then have your tears on your cheeks.
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(The laws of the apostles)

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forth to all the land under his authority to teach the people the statutes given by God to the prophet Moses, and the worship that should be given to God.

“So Jehoshaphat dwelt in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, and brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers” (4)

Having got in touch with God’s compassion on him despite his faults, he readily received the rebuke; did not protest nor resisted God as his father did; but counted the Lord’s chastisement and rebuke as a kind of divine mercy. Hence he returned to Jerusalem, and went out again among the people to bring them back to the Lord God of their fathers. On him the words of Solomon apply, saying: *“Rebuke a wise man, and he will be still wiser”* (Proverb 9: 8, 9). Beside instructing the priests, the Levites, and the leaders to teach the people, he went out himself to make sure that justice is practically applied everywhere.; As it probably caused offense to the people to see their king get into a relationship of marriage with the evil king Ahab, and some, as a result perverted to idol-worship, that is why Jehoshaphat put in his heart to double his efforts to return them to the Lord God of their fathers; and he set forth from the far South to the far North, from Beersheba in the South to the mountains of Ephraim in the North; counting it as an atonement for his unfortunate visit to Ahab. It is likewise befitting of us, in case we cause an offense to others, to do our best to mend our fault.

- + He exhorts us not to stop at raising prayers, without positively contributing with something on our side. ... Notice how he shows his own role, namely his hope, the source of every goodness; according to the prophet: *“Let Your mercy, O Lord be upon us, just as we hope in You”* (Psalm 33: 22); and, *“Consider the generations of old and see, has anyone trusted in the Lord and was disappointed?”* (Sirach 2: 10); and as Paul says *“Hope does*

not disappoint" (Romans 5: 5). ... Do you see the greatness of hope of Paul in God; saying that whatever happen he shall never be disappointed; ; They will never prevail on me; but the Lord Christ will always be glorified in my body. Yes, they expected to bring Paul into their snare, to quench the fire of his preaching the gospel, but to no avail.om)

4- JEHOSHAPHAT'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THE JUDGES HE APPOINTED FOR THE LOWER COURTS OF JUSTICE:

"Then he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city" (5)

Beside the priests, the Levites, and the leaders to teach the people, Jehoshaphat previously sent (17: 7-9), Now he sends judges and set steady courts in the small cities, villages, in Jerusalem and the major cities, with the goal of supervising the execution of the statutes the people have learned; and to rein the evildoers.

There might have been judges before, but on account of that they probably did their duties slothfully, or were despised by the people; Jehoshaphat set a new judiciary system, with the following new responsibilities:

- a- Keeping the people in the worship of God
- b- Punishing those who break the law and statutes.
- c- Solving the controversies among the people.

"And said to the judges: 'Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment" (6)

The king warned the judges against performing their duties according to their own tendencies, and not according to the Lord; saying: *"Take heed in what you*

are doing, for you do not judge for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment” (6). He sought from them to walk by the spirit of godliness, saying: “Let the fear of the Lord be put upon you; for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, partiality, nor taking bribes”. He sought from them to commit themselves to faithfulness, for the following reasons:

- a- They do not judge for man but for the Lord; they are His servants (6)
- b- The eyes of the Lord are upon them; and He is with them in the judgment (6)
- c- God is their leader, their role model in justice; in whom there is no iniquity, partiality, nor taking bribes (7)
- d- Any fault they may commit will be counted as against the Lord Himself (10)

“Now, therefore, let the fear of the Lord be put upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor partiality, nor taking of bribes” (7)

Jehoshaphat experienced how to deal with God: Whoever honors The Lord, he will be honored by the Lord; Whoever fears Him, He will give him awe before the others; and whoever lends the Lord through the poor, He will pay him back double as much as he gave. By such a principle he instructed the judges to walk with awe, not through the use of the human authority, and issuing orders, but , having the fear of God, the awe of God will dwell upon them. ... In his talk to the judges, Jehoshaphat reveals his heart filled with love, faithfulness, and fear of the Lord.

- + The fear of the Lord includes all those requirements (for the continuous joy). For whoever fears the Lord as is befitting, and trusts in Him, will collect all the sources of happiness, and will acquire the perfect fountain of

gladness. As a drop of water that falls on a wide open ocean will soon disappear; it will also be with whoever fears God, his fear will be scattered and disappear in the huge ocean of the Lord's joy. It is really amazing; for together with the causes for man to have sorrow, we find him exultant. For whatever sorrow he may have, its bitterness will be nothing to him compared to his enjoyment of the perpetual joy

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Because Cain did not fear God by his own will, the fear of God came upon him against his will. He became a fugitive and a wanderer in terror on the face of the earth.

6- JEHOSEPHAT'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THE JUDGES HE APPOINTED FOR THE HIGHER COURTS OF JUSTICE:

"Moreover in Jerusalem, for the judgment of the Lord and for controversies, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests, and some of the chief fathers of Israel, when they returned to Jerusalem" (8)

The king set a supreme court in Jerusalem the capital, to look into the major issues, or into the appeal of anyone who feels that a lower court has misjudged him.; He set it in Jerusalem to be able to intervene by himself in any serious case.

Here the king discerns between "the judgment of the Lord", and "the controversies". By the former he probably means the cases concerning the law of

God; while by the later he means cases concerning the controversies between men.

“And commanded them, saying, ‘Thus you shall act in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a loyal heart’ (9)

Together with his care for justice to prevail upon his whole kingdom, and for lifting up any oppression or partiality; Jehoshaphat, in his talk to the judges, concentrated on godliness, faithfulness, and the purity of heart.

Despite falling, himself, in serious weaknesses, like entering into a relation of marriage with Ahab the evil king of Israel; yet his actions and talk to the judges reveal the exaltation of his spiritual life, the uprightness of his concepts, and the purity of his heart.

+ It is not the defilement of the body that offends the Lord, as much as the defilement of the soul;. By saying: *“Blessed are the pure”*, he means *“the pure in heart, who will see God”* (Matthew 5: 8). The prophet also says: *“Create in me a clean heart, O God”* (Psalm 51: 10); and, *“Wash my heart from wickedness”* (Jeremiah 4: 14)

+ I see many beat their breast (Luke 23: 48), saying: [We sinned]; assuming that their hearts utter it together with their tongues; but to them and the like I say: Not everyone who says [I sinned, I sinned], will be forgiven; according to the words of the Lord: *“Not everyone who says to me: Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven”* (Matthew 7: 21)

In the Holy Book I see how Judas the betrayer said before the priests and the elders of the Jews; *“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”* (Matthew 27: 4); how it was also said by king Saul before the prophet

Samuel (1 Samuel 15: 24-34); and how it was said by king David before the prophet Nathan; Yet only one of those heard the response of forgiveness, namely David (2 Samuel 12: 13); because he said it truly from the heart (Psalm 51: 1); and he was steadfast in his prayers as is obvious in his book of psalms.

- + "*Blessed the pure in heart for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5: 8). Notice how the reward is spiritual; He calls those who reach the climax of virtues, and who have no evil in their hearts; who control themselves; and keep away from evil desires, "*the pure in heart*"; For the apostle Paul also says: "*Pursue peace with all men, and holiness without which no one will see the Lord*" Hebrew 12: 14).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Do not make your mouth ready but your heart ... What we miss is not what we see but what we believe; we therefore seek, not what touch our outer senses; nor say: [Let those who saw the Lord by their eyes and touched Him by their hands after His resurrection, believe; but concerning us who did not see nor touched Him, why should we believe?]
- + Change the heart, for then you may change the works. Uproot the evil desires, and plant the love. For "*as the desire (for money) is the root of all kinds of evil*" (1 Timothy 6: 10); So is love, the root of all goodness.

(St. Augustine)

- + The heart of man is not a small thing; for it can accommodate all that.

(The scholar Origen)

“whatever case comes to you from your brethren who dwell in their cities, whether of bloodshed or of offences against law or commandment, against statutes or ordinances, you shall warn them, lest they trespass against the Lord, and wrath come upon you and your brethren. Do this and you will not be guilty” (10)

He gave special care for judging the cases of murder, namely shedding blood, for their seriousness; and for whoever sheds the blood of his brother in humanity will be as though he has done wrong to the heart of His Creator, the lover of mankind.

God does not endure to see the blood of the innocent shed without guilt; saying to Cain: *“The voice of your brother’s blood cries out from the earth”* (Genesis 4: 11); He does not endure even shedding the blood of the wicked; saying: *“Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance” And the Lord put a mark on cane, so that no one who came upon him would kill him”* (Genesis 4: 14-15). God’s hatred for blood shedding is apparent in saying to David, His beloved prophet: *“You have shed much blood, and have made great wars, you shall not build a house for my name”* (1 Chronicles 22: 8)

In the statute of the cities of refuge (Numbers 25: 29 -34), God intended to protect whoever causes the death of someone unintentionally. But that does not imply any leniency with the crime of murder; He therefore made the following conditions for it:

- a- The charge of murder is not to be confirmed by the testimony of one witness, but by that of more than one; and its punishment is death.
- b- It is not possible for a confirmed murderer to pay a ransom on his soul; lest the rich would assume that by his money he can kill and pay ransom. But if he who kills will be put to death.
- c- Slothfulness in punishing the murderer is counted as defilement of the land on which he dwells; in the midst of which the Lord dwells.

“And take notice: Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord, and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king’s matters; also the Levites will be officials before you. Behave courageously, and the Lord will be with the good” (11)

He set the chief priest to reside over the supreme court; most probably for issues concerning the religious statutes and worship; and the (prime minister) for those concerning the things of the king (the civil cases).

Of the beautiful features of the personality of Jehoshaphat was strengthening and encouraging the souls to work by the spirit of courage and hope in the good Lord who works in and by men. He learned it from God Himself who said to Joshua: *“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go”* (Joshua 1: 9).. And with the same spirit He said to Jeremiah: *“Do not say I am a youth; for you shall go to all to whom I send you; Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you;They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you”* (Jeremiah 1: 7, 8, 19). The more the servant hides in God, he will feel safe and fear no one else; and according to St. John El-Dargi: [Whoever become a servant of God, only fears his Master; but whoever has no fear of his Master, will most probably fears his own shadow].

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 19

BRING ME BACK, O LORD, TO THE HIGHER JERUSALEM

- + How exultant was Jehoshaphat's soul when he returned to Your holy city;
He counted Your city Jerusalem as his own home where he finds comfort;
For he would not find comfort except in Your bosom;
Foolishly, he entered into a relationship of marriage with the evil Ahab;
I wonder if he was impressed by his conquests, or wished for the union of
the two kingdoms;
His friendship with the evil man almost had him killed; If not for his simple
soul and pure heart, that rescued him;
And he returned safe to Jerusalem.

- + For the sake of Your love for him, and for the sake of his salvation,
You sent to him the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani to rebuke him;
In humility he listened to him, for he is a man of God;
He did his best to remove the wooden images from the land;
And he delivered his heart to You to prepare it, to seek You.

- + He set judges, not to execute his commands;
but to judge for You, and not for any man;
He called them to have Your holy fear;
To enjoy Your awe over them;
He exhorted them to imitate You, O amazing in Your righteousness;
He warned them against oppressing anybody, being partial, or to receive
bribes.

+ He exhorted them to walk with godliness, faithfulness, and the perfection of heart.

For then You would work in and by them; and Your fear would prevail among the people;

He strongly commanded them to keep Your law;
And to obey Your commandment;
And warned them against iniquity and disobedience.

+ As You have strengthened Joshua and told him not to fear anyone;
And proclaimed Your company with him wherever he goes;
So did Jehoshaphat, he strengthened those working with him;
He confirmed to them that You long to accompany them. O Good Shepherd.

+ Grant me, O Lord the pure heart of David and Jehoshaphat;
To let Your Spirit work in me , to desire for all to be leaders;
To fill my heart with hope, joy, and peace;
And present from what is Yours to my brethren.

+ Amazing are Your works, O my Lord;
Out of sinners, You set saints;
And from the weak, mighty men of valor;
And You lifted them up from the trash heap, to sit together with the elites of Your people;

+ Glory be to You, who works in all generations;
To set a remnant to testify to You;
And ambassadors who walk with Your Holy Spirit;
Glory be to You, for returning Jehoshaphat safe to Jerusalem;
Grant my heart to return pure to Your High Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 21

KING JEHORAM PASSED AWAY TO NO ONE'S SORROW

With the exception of the verses 5 to 10, all what came in this chapter about Jehoram, were not included in (2 kings 8).

I wonder who was responsible for the evil that dwelt upon Judah: Was it Jehoshaphat who did what was right in the sight of God (20: 32), yet allowed his son Jehoram to marry the daughter of the evil Ahab and Isabel; Or was it the sin of the son who insisted on marrying her. Anyway, Jehoram learned evil from his wife who took it after her mother Isabel. Jehoram perverted with the kingdom of Judah to walk in the way of the kingdom of Israel, or even worse.. But although Jehoram led the house of David to the maximum level of danger, the Lord was faithful in His promise to David and his seed.

According to some, God allowed the people of Judah to have that evil king, as a punishment or a chastisement, for not benefiting from the movement of reform in the days of Jehoshaphat the good king. It was written: *“Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for as yet the people have not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers”* (20: 33).

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|--|--------|
| 1- Jehoram reigns in his father Jehoshaphat's place | 1 - 3 |
| 2- To establish his throne, Jehoram, the evil king killed his brothers | 4 |
| 3- Jehoram walks in the ways of the kings of Israel | |
| 5 - 6 | |
| 4- Jehoram's conquest over the Edomites as a divine gift | 7 - 11 |
| 5- The prophet Elijah's prophecy against Jehoram | 12 - |
- 15

- | | |
|---|------|
| 6- Jehoram's defeat before the Philistines and the Arabians | 16 - |
| 17 | |
| 7- The Lord chastens Jehoram by sickness | 18 - |
| 19 | |
| 8- Jehoram passes away to no one's sorrow | 20 |

1- JEHORAM REIGNS IN HIS FATHER JEHOSHAPHAT'S PLACE:

"And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. Then Jehoram his son reigned in his place" (1)

"He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariahu, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel" (2)

Jehoram took a position completely contrary to that of his father Jehoshaphat. As a matter of fact Jehoshaphat was the king of Judah and not of Israel; yet, according to some, the author of the two books of the chronicles considers the kingdom of Judah, the true kingdom of Israel on whose throne sits the house of David; and consider the Northern kingdom as a rebellious kingdom; and hence they often disregarded it.

"Their father gave them great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn" (3)

It so seems that Jehoram's brothers were wiser than him, attached to the Lord and not to idol-worship. Yet Jehoshaphat, being committed to the prevailing tradition, gave the kingdom to his firstborn son; and gave his brothers many gifts of silver, gold, precious things, and fortified cities, to keep them from revolting against their brother. Whom he set as a partner on the throne for as long as three years before his death; then Jehoram reigned alone for five years.

2- JEHORAM, THE EVIL KING ESTABLISHES HIS THRONE BY KILLING HIS BROTHERS:

“Now when Jehoram was established over the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself and killed all his brothers with the sword, and also others of the princes of Israel” (4)

The love of authority turns man into a vicious beast; it destroys in him every love, corrupts his humanity, and makes a devil out of him. Not giving the foremost importance to the good of his people, their relationship to God, and their sanctification, Jehoshaphat spoiled his evil son, who consequently did not respect his father's love for him, but killed his brothers and some of the leaders of Israel, in whom he most probably felt a tendency to worship the living God.

There was nothing to make Jehoram fear his brothers and those leaders, but he most probably carried the same feelings of Cain who envied his brother Abel, whose godliness, the purity of his heart, and his good worship to God, became a testimonial against him. Jehoram certainly did that by the influence of his wife Athaliah, as a preparation for the idol-worship. ... Killing the brother of the king and some of the leaders beloved by the people, was a custom in the pagan nations, which still prevails in some developed countries, yet in a hidden form. The fathers of the church often warn us against the turning of some leaders of the church away from the spirit of fatherhood through the love of authority.

- + Do not let the priesthood rank lead you to haughtiness, but rather make you humble; for corruption and reproach are born from haughtiness. The higher your holy priesthood rank, the more humble you should be. Remembering the sons of Aaron, a knowledge of the holy life is a knowledge of meekness and humility. Humility is an imitation of the Lord Christ; while haughtiness and arrogance is an imitation of the devil.

Follow, therefore Christ and not the antichrist; God, the oppressor of God; the Master and not the rebellious slave; the Merciful and not the merciless; the Lover of humanity, and not her enemy; your partner in the secret place of the Groom, and not the dweller of darkness. Do not long to misuse the authority over the congregation; so as not to put on your own neck the sins of others.

- + It is not nature, but the love of authority, that divided humanity into masters and slaves.
- + Whoever gets the authority for himself through men, will be perpetually indebted to those who gave it to him.
- + It is God who raises the kings; and it is Him who brings them down from their thrones.
- + Woe to the ruler who misuses his authority with selfishness; for the punishment is waiting for him by the divine Judge; who will deal with him with cruelty equal to that by which he treated the saints of God.
- + I wish the ruler is not puffed up by his position, lest he falls down from the blessing of humility. But it is befitting of him to adopt the true humility in serving the others;I wish the greater be like the lowest.
- + It is befitting of those who occupy the high positions to be ready to offer even the physical services, like the Lord who washed the feet of his disciples; hence it is said: "*Let him who governs be as he who serves*" (Luke 22: 26).
- + To avoid the confusion coming when everyone runs his affairs according to his own will; it is befitting of whoever be put in a position of

responsibility, to reveal the exaltation of his mind, and his wisdom, by making all his possessions a common property with those who follow his example

(St. Basil the Great)

3- JEHORAM WALKS IN THE WAY OF THE KINGS OF ISRAEL:

“Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem” (5)

“And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for he had the daughter of Ahab as a wife, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord” (6)

The way matrimony is holy, it also has its dangerous activity in the life of man; For Jehoram’s evil wife managed to draw her husband the king to walk in the way of her wicked father and mother at the expense of the whole kingdom, and his and their salvation.

Speaking about the importance of choosing the right wife, St. Eronimus quotes the wise and expert Solomon, by the inspiration of God; saying: *“For by means of a harlot, a man is reduced to a crust of bread, and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life”* (Proverb 6: 26); He will most certainly be in need of the bread that comes down from heaven.

- + Marriage is a spiritual gift; but it will not be as such if it is done with a non-believer. The Spirit of God will not be given to dwell in no-believers.

- + The husband and wife are one, the same way wine and water become when they are mixed together. As the non-believing partner will corrupt the

believer; hence whoever is not yet married is committed, either to refrain completely from getting married, or be married in the Lord

(The scholar Origen)

4- JEHORAM'S CONQUEST OVER THE EDMITES AS A DIVINE

GIFT:

“Yet the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever” (7)

In the reign of Jehoram and his son Ahazia, we find nothing that does not warrant the complete destruction of Judah; yet the Lord remain faithful to His promises; He did not intend to take away David's throne until the Messiah the Son of David comes, He who reigns on the hearts forever (Psalm 89: 30-37).

“In his days the Edomites revolted against Judah's authority, and made a king over themselves” (8)

Edom, south-east of Judah, that submitted to Jehoshaphat, as we saw in the last chapter, now revolted against Judah's authority, and their revolt succeeded, and the conditions became extremely critical (8-10).

As Jehoram revolted against the Lord his God, denied Him; and made for himself pagan gods the Edomites revolted against him, and made a king over themselves.. Nevertheless, for the sake of God's promise to David, He gave Jehoram the chance to reconsider his position, and let him conquer Edom for a certain time.

Yet Jehoram, , later on, came to lose, not only Edom, but a city of his kingdom – Libnah – (a city of the priests, that used to have her own king from the old (Joshua 12), revolted as a protest against the iniquities of the king, because he has forsaken the Lord God of his fathers..

When man attaches himself to God in love and loyalty, fears the Lord and honors Him; many people will attach themselves to him, and he will be feared even by his opponents.

“So Jehoram went out with his officers and all his chariots with him. And he rose by night and attacked the Edomites who has surrounded him and the captains of the chariots” (9)

“Thus the Edomites have been in revolt against Judah’s authority to this day. At that time Libnah revolted against his rule, because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers” (10)

Because Jehoram did not benefit from the chance of the conquest over Edom, given to him by God, Edom resumed its revolt against Jehoram, and Judah eventually collapsed before Edom.

“Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit harlotry, and led Judah astray” (11)

The kings who preceded Jehoram might have failed to take away the high places on the mountains of Judah; but Jehoram went further by making his own high places, something never done by any of the kings of Judah who preceded him.

The sin of adultery was bound to the pagan worship on two aspects:

- a- Idol worship was most probably bound to harlotry; for in the temple of Aphrodite, there were about one thousand priestesses who offered their bodies to sin, for money that was used for the maintenance of the temple.
- b- The worship of the living God was counted as an entrance into what is like a familial relationship, in which the soul gets attached to God as a holy bride. Perversion to idol worship is therefore counted as a practice of adultery. It is written: *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves; and for your transgressions your mother has been put away”* (Isaiah 50: 1). And, *“The Lord said also to me:’Hove you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every mountain, and under every green tree, and there played the harlot”* (Jeremiah 3: 6); *“Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also”* (Jeremiah 3: 8); *“So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees”* (Jeremiah 3: 9); And, *“Oholah played the harlot even though she was mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians”* (Ezekiel 23: 5); *“Yet she multiplied her harlotry in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, when she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt”* (Ezekial 23: 19); *“For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. They have committed adultery with their idols, and even sacrificed their sons whom they bore to Me, , passing them through the fire, to devour them”* (Ezekiel 23: 37); And, *“When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: ‘Go take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry; for the land had committed great harlotry”* (Hosea 1: 2)

5- ELIJAH’S PROPHECY AGAINST JEHORAM:

*“And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying: ‘Thus says the Lord God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father,
or in the ways of Asa king of Judah’” (12)*

Because Jehoram took the position of challenge against God; preferring the corruption and defilement to the holiness of God, the prophet Elijah sent him a message prophesying his sad end. This message is considered the first example of the prophetic message, a full century before the writings of Amos and Isaiah. Although the book of the kings devoted six chapters to Elijah, yet we do not find in them any reference to this message from him to Jehoram, proclaiming in it that he will be stricken with an ugly disease, and condemned him on three actions:

- a- Forsaking the Lord
- b- Spreading the corruption
- c- Revolting against the Lord.

How did Elijah send a message to Jehoram, the successor of Jehoshaphat, when it so seems that Elijah had been taken to heaven before Jehoshaphat reigns (2 kings 1-3)?

Did Elijah write this message long before that, and reached Jehoram after the death of Jehoshaphat?

Or did Elijah write the message to Jehoram before reigning on the throne, as a prophecy about what will happen to him? This is what some of the old Rabbis proclaim, counting that Elijah has been granted the knowledge of many things of the future.

Or that after taking Elijah up to heaven in the chariot of fire, he was sent again by God to earth to take care of this specific case.

Or according to some, this message was told by Elijah to his disciple Elisha, before he mounts the fiery chariot; and Elisha sent it to king Jehoram to exhort

him to return from his evil ways, and follow the lead of his good father Jehoshaphat and his grandfather Asa, who both lived revered in peace and godliness.

Anyway, many of Elijah's actions while on earth were exalted, and it was difficult to imagine or analyze many of his deeds. Therefore we may accept any interpretation of Elijah's actions.

"But have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and you made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father's household, who were better than yourself," (13)

Elijah condemned king Jehoram on two serious charges:

- a- Following the lead of the evil king Ahab, instead of those of his own father and grandfather, and perverted to idol worship.
- b- Killing his own brothers and some of the beloved leaders, without any cause; although they were better than him.

"Behold, the Lord will strike your people with a serious affliction – your children, your wife, and all your possessions" (14)

The verdict was issued that the Lord will strike his people, children, and wives, with a serious affliction; on account of that they have, together with him, perverted to idol worship; and of that his wives were the cause of his perversion.

"And you will become very sick with a disease in your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day" (15)

The affliction will not stop at dwelling on his wives and children, but will also dwell upon him as well; he will become very sick with a disease in his intestines, until his intestines come out of his belly. The Lord intended to confirm to him that what dwelt upon him, his household, and people, are not by chance, but as a chastisement from the Lord, because of his persistence on his sins with no repentance or return to his Creator. Having learned the evil from Ahab and his daughter, he should have also learned from Ahab how he humbled himself when he got a divine message through God's prophet (1 king 21: 27); when he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth, and went about mourning". But Jehoram did not care for the warnings of the Lord, and most probably threw the message from the prophet Elijah into the trash basket.

Now, not every disease that dwells on man is counted as caused by a sin he has committed. For the righteous 'Job' has been inflicted by a serious disease, not as a fruit of his sins, as much as for the sake of his justification. His bruises produced maggots that covered his whole body like a garment, that he could not take off. and his skin cracked and was torn. 'Job' became like a horribly disgusting heap of dust full of maggots, with an extremely abhorrent smell

+ But his bruises prepared for him a crown in heaven.

(St. Jerome)

+ What harm came upon Lazarus because of his sickness, wounds, poverty, and the absence of anyone to protect him? Have all those things not weaved for him a crown of flowers of conquest?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Moreover the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirits of the Philistines and the Arabians who were near the Ethiopians” (16)

“And they came up into Judah and invaded and carried away all the possessions that were found in the king’s house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son

left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons” (17)

This chapter ends by the darkest hours upon Judah; Not caring for the warnings of the Lord, stirred up against Jehoram the spirits of the Philistines, the Arabians, and the Ethiopians, who joined forces against him, came up into Judah, and carried away all the possessions that were found in the king’s house, and also of his sons and his wives, whom they killed after captivation (22:1), the same way Jehoram killed his brothers . Only one son was spared – Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons, known by the names ‘Ahaziah’ (22: 1), and ‘Azariah’ (22: 6); For the Lord intended to leave a lamp for David and his seeds.

7- THE LORD CHASTIZED JEHORAM BY SICKNESS:

“After all this the Lord struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease” (18)

“Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two years that his intestines came out because of his sickness, so he dies in severe pain. And his people made no burning

for him, like the burning of his fathers” (19)

As the statutes warned those who do not fear the Lord, and persist on opposing Him, that they will fall under painful and chronic illnesses (Deuteronomy 28: 58-59); So was the illness of Jehoram that lasted two long years without giving him a chance of rest, while being in his prime youth, a little less than forty years of age.

Yes indeed, the Lord allowed for king Asa, who had an upright heart in the sight of God, to be inflicted with sickness, but it was only in his feet; while Jehoram who had no compassion toward his own brothers, was stricken in his intestines, until they came out of his belly; to make him perceive what have dwelt upon his spiritual inside, and return to the Lord.

Many saints, like the apostle Paul, have been tempted with illness, either to justify them, or to protect them against pride; to say: "*The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak*" (Mark 14: 38); and to find comfort in the saying of the apostle Paul: "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Galatians 2: 20)

God allowed for the chastisements to dwell gradually upon Jehoram, to give him a chance to repent:

- a- He let Elijah send him a warning on the hand of his disciple Elisha
- b- He allowed for the Philistines, the Arabians, and the Ethiopians to stir up, and to join forces against him
- c- Those allied enemies carried away all the possessions they found in the king's house, together with his wives and children
- d- Inflicted with illness, Jehoram lost all his energies, his soul was destroyed, and had no more hope to restore his household and treasures
- e- What made his illness more bitter was his deprivation of the presence of his wives and children, who could have cared for him in his weakness.

God intended to reveal before his eyes the fruits of sin; being ill, poor, lonely, and denied of God's pleasure and grace. Yet despite all that he did not return to God.

"His people made no burning for him like the burnings of his fathers"(19).

Interpreted by some as: [They did not make for him a funeral like that of his fathers, during which they used to burn precious spices

9- JEHORAM DEPARTED TO NO ONE'S SORROW:

“He was thirty-two years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and to no one’s sorrow, departed. However they buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings” (20)

Shame and reproach dwelt upon Jehoram, in the moments of his death, and even after his death; for no one felt sorry for him because the abundance of his evil.

- a- Although he only reigned for eight years, *“for no one’s sorrow he departed”*; for all felt that no greater calamity would dwell over Jerusalem than what did in his days
- b- As an expression of the bitterness of their souls because of his corruption, the leaders and the people buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings, counting him as not worthy of it.
- c- They made no burning for him like the burning of his fathers (19). According to some, they did not honor his dead body by putting precious spices on it, nor pouring sweet fragrance, although the extremely abhorrent smell of his corpse warranted it..
- d- It is amazing that the people who listened to Jehoram, and have forsaken the worship of the living God, and perverted to idol-worship, despised him because of his evil, corruption, and violence.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 21

GRANT ME, O LORD, THE TRUE SPIRIT OF ROYALTY

- + You have set my early parents: Adam and Eve, a king and a queen;
You granted them authority over the beasts, the birds, and the fish;
And over all the irrational creation;
You did not set them to have authority on mankind;
You did not create a man to be a slave of his fellow human.

- + Grant me authority, by Your grace, over my mind, senses, and emotions;
Set Your kingdom inside me;
To keep the love of authority from crawling into my depths;
So as not to bear the spirit of the tyrant devil;
But to walk by Your Spirit, O amazing in Your humility.

- + Let me unite with You, to have the right to set forth to be the last of all;
Let me bear Your love for mankind;
Let me desire to wash the feet of all;
Let me honor You in every poor and small;
You despise no one among men;
You delivered Yourself for the sake of all;
Out of men You have set kings great in Your sight.

- + Jehoram killed his brothers to establish his throne;
He covered his hands with his brothers' blood;
And corrupted his heart by the love of authority;
His pride delivered him to his enemies who killed his wives and children.

- + Not listening to the voice of Elijah Your prophet;
His own people did not listen to him, nor honored him as their king;
Illness crawled in his intestines day after day;
He lost his wives, children, riches, and health.

+ He became an example to any one provoked to evil by the love of authority;

His own people did not care for him during his illness;

And they did not bury his dead body in the tombs of the kings;

He departed to no one's sorrow.



CHAPTER 22

KING AHAZIAH THE SON OF JEHORAM AND THE BLOOD-THIRSTY QUEEN ATHALIAH

Many of the details of this chapter also came in (2 kings 8: 25-29; 9: 27-28; 10: 13-14' 11: 1-2). Ahazia inherited the evil from his father Jehoram. He did not learn a lesson from what dwelt upon his father, but he was influenced more by his mother Athaliah who "*counseled him to do wickedly*" (3)

The darkest moments dwelt upon Judah, as one of the fruits when Jehoshaphat entered into a relationship of marriage with the evil Ahab.

Jehoram died to no one's sorrow, and his wife Athaliah received the throne. Being a an exact copy of her mother Isabel, no wonder that Athaliah was blood-thirsty.

1- Ahaziah, king of Judah	1 - 2
2- Ahaziah walks in the way of Ahab, king of Israel	3 - 4
3- Ahaziah joins Johoram king of Israel in battle	5
4- Jahu kills Ahaziah	6 - 9
5- Athaliah mother of Ahaziah takes the throne by force	10
6- Hiding Joash the son of Ahaziah in the temple	11- 12

1- AHAZIAH, KING OF JUDAH

“Then the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place, for the raiders who came with the Arabians into the camp had killed all the older ones. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah reigned” (1)

Saying: *“The inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah king”* (1), hints to that they were not comfortable with his taking the throne, probably because he was the youngest of his brothers, or because of his weak personality; but there was no other way before them, *“for the raiders who came with the Arabians into the camp killed all his older brothers”* (1). He became a king on the apparent aspect; for his mother Athaliah was the one who actually ran the affairs of the kingdom.

“Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri” (2)

In the Septuagint version it came that Ahaziah was twenty years old when he became king; which is more acceptable according to what came in the last chapter, that Jehoram, his father was thirty-two years old, when he became king, and reigned for eight years; namely died when he was forty years old; by which his twenty years old son Ahaziah was born when his father was twenty years old. Ahaziah was influenced by counselors from the Northern kingdom (Israel), more than any other king of Judah.

In the last chapter we read that the wives and children of Jehoram were captivated and killed; but that does not imply that all of his wives and all their sons were killed. That is why in the present chapter it is mentioned that one of his sons “Ahaziah”, and one of his wives “Athaliah” were spared. It could be said that “Athaliah”, together with her evil mother “Isabel”, were the source of reproach and a catastrophe , to both kingdoms: Israel and Judah.

We already know how “Athaliah” intended to destroy all the royal seed; to make sure that the divine promise concerning the continuity of the throne of David, will not be fulfilled.

2- AHAZIAH WALKS IN THE WAY OF AHAB:

“He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother counseled him to do wickedly” (3)

After burying his evil father Jehoram, the people of Judah hoped that his younger son “Ahaziah” would not walk in his father’s ways; but his mother and her family provoked him to do.. Having no principles of his own to live accordingly, Ahaziah trusted in his mother Athaliah the daughter of Omri, a very ambitious and violent woman, to lead him and to counsel him to make alliance with Jehoram the son of Ahab.

“Therefore he did evil in the sight of the Lord, like the house of Ahab, for they were his counselors after the death of his father, to his destruction” (4)

3- AHAZIAH JOINS JEHORAM IN BATTLE:

“He also walked in their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to make war against hazael king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram” (5)

4- JEHU KILLS AHAZIAH:

“Then returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds he had received at Ramoth, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah the son of Jehoram king of Judah, went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick” (6)

“His going to Joram was God’s occasion for Azariah downfall; for when he arrived, he went out with Jehoram, against Jehu the son of Nimch, whom the Lord had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab” (7)

We already talked about Jahu in our commentary on the second book of the kings (2 kings 9: 27-28).

What happened to Ahaziah was a fruit of the evil friendships,; having relationship (marriage in particular) with the evil men; and idol-worship. If we do not have fear of contagion of the perversion to evil, let us fear perdition along with the evildoers; Hence the commandment of the Lord came, saying: *“Come out of Babylon”* (Revelation 18: 4)

“And it happened that when Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, and found the princes of Judah, and the sons of Ahaziah’s brother who served Ahaziah, that he killed them” (8)

“Then he searched for Ahaziah found him hiding in Samaria), and brought him to Jehu. When they had killed him, they buried him, because they said,

: ‘he is the son of Jehoshaphat who sought the Lord with all his heart’. Jehu let them bury him. So the house of Azariah had no one to assume power over the kingdom” (9)

5- ATHALIAH, MOTHER OF AHAZIAH TAKES THE THRONE BY FORCE:.

“Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs of the house of Judah” (10)

As it also came in (2 kings 11: 1 etc.), Athaliah gave the command to kill all her own grandchildren, to make sure of being established on the throne. That evil woman sought to destroy the household of David forever, to build on its ruins a throne for herself. She viciously destroyed all the royal seed, to turn the throne from the house of David to that of her relatives on her mother's side.. According to the historian Josephus, having inherited from her parents their hatred against David's house. she intended to let no one of them alive, to make sure that no king will ever come again of that house. She was obsessed by her desire to annul the divine promise for the descendants of David to sit on the throne forever, and that the Savior Messiah will come of them.

According to some, beside Athaliah's desire to let no one touch her crown, and to let no one of the descendants of David sit on the throne of Judah, she intended to avenge killing her mother Isabel and destroying her family on the hand of Jehu. She assumed that it was her right for avenge even against her own descendants with Jehoram, one of David's household. The bitter hatred in Athaliah's depths against the house of David, for what happened to her family, provoked her to hate the God of David.

What Athaliah did was to be done, as well, by king Herod in the massacre of the children of Bethlehem, to establish his throne. Both Athaliah and Herod assumed that they became safe, not perceiving that God is the Almighty Protector of His people. God allowed for what happened to the house of David, to confirm that it is God's care alone that had the upper hand; to have a little infant of David's

seed be spared, to leave a lamp for his household; and to guarantee that the Savior Messiah will come from David's seed; a divine plan for salvation that the devil vainly tried his best to annul.

+ I saw how the wicked live in peace!, But what kind of peace? A temporary, changeable, passing, and earthly. ... Yet I see myself seeking the same from God. ... I saw how those who have not ministered to God, have got what I, a minister of God, desire to get. "*My feet had almost stumbled; My steps have nearly slipped*" (Psalm 73: 2)..But now I perceive that they have peace and prosperity on earth; for their punishment is not going to be temporary, but will abide forever

+ About the wicked, after their death, it is said. "*Where is the tent, the dwelling place of the wicked?*" (Job 21: 28)..

Looking thoroughly into this, Can you deny that there will be a reward or punishment by the divine justice?

On the heart of the righteous, happiness will prevail; And on that of the wicked misery will prevail....

The former is happy to depart from this world; and the later is sorrowful. Who can utter vindication on him who is guilty in the eyes of his own conscience?

Saying, "*Where is the tent, the dwelling place of the wicked?*"

The life of a criminal is a dream; and the comfort in which the wicked live is an illusion; They are now in Hades; and will go down to hell while living.

+ The righteous 'Job' answers: Do not think yourselves are happy while plunging in evil pleasures; when the strikes of God have not yet dwelt on you in this life;

For "*The light of the wicked indeed goes out, and the flame of his fire does not shine*" (Job 18: 5). It may give light for some time, but not forever.

And despite the fact that men flatter those people, on account of that they practice God's will, who has the authority over this world (John 14: 30); but it usually happens that there will be a turning of the events; and sorrows will eventually come through the wrath of heaven; when the wicked are sifted "like chaff before the wind; while the righteous are like wheat. See what the Lord said to Peter: "*Indeed Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail*" (Luke 22: 31-32).

(St. Ambrose)

+ "And the number of years of oppression of the wicked is not a sure thing"
... It is well known that every proud man practices his tyranny according to his own measure. Someone practices it according to his high position in a State; another in a province, another in a city, another within his own

family; and another hides his evil, to practice it upon himself in the thought of his heart.

God is not preoccupied with the size of evil that man **is able to practice**; as much as with **its actual size that he has in his mind**. Someone without authority on others, may be a tyrant within himself; iniquity may have authority on him inside. Although he may not have the authority to press his neighbors outside himself, yet, within himself, he looks for a chance and authority to press on others. Looking into the hearts of men, in the eyes of God, the wicked is counted as though have already practiced evil, according to what he imagines in his mind.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

6- HIDING JOASH THE SON OF AHAZIAH IN THE TEMPLE:

“But Jehoshabeath the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king’s sons who were being murdered, and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. So Jehoshabeath , the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah) had him from Athaliah so that she did not kill him” (11)

Trusting in his mother Athaliah the daughter of Omri, the extremely violent woman, who counseled him to do wickedly (3), Ahazia made an alliance with Jehoram the son of Ahab.

Yet, in the midst of the massacre done by Athaliah to destroy all the royal seed, to establish her throne; the lamp of the Lord’s anointed was not quenched; for the

Lord kept a weak suckling, a symbol of the infant Lord Christ who will be spared in the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem.

In the Sabbatical year – the seventh year – the year of comfort for the land, **Joash** appeared to reign before the eyes of all; proclaimed as the only one to have the right for the crown as a king.

+ The way, God prepares for those who love him, is beyond human perception; so is what He prepares of torture for the wicked.

(The scholar Origen)

+ The wicked are bitterly sifted as light tares, while the righteous, on the other hand will be saved as heavy wheat.. Notice what the Lord said to Peter: *“Indeed Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail”* (Luke 22: 31-32). Those who are sifted like tares will perish; but he who will not perish, will be like a seed that falls on good ground, springs up, and yields a crop a hundredfold (Luke 8: 8).... He likens evil to chaff that swiftly burns and turn into ashes.

(St. Ambrose)

“And he was hidden with them in the house of God for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land” (12)

Her sitting on the throne had no legal foundation. Her love for shedding blood caused her to lose her popularity, if it was ever there; and. Being so violent and mighty, she assumed that no one could disobey or oppose her.

The little infant Joash was hidden in the house of God through a divine wisdom:

- a- It was impossible for anyone to hide that infant in his own house, for if the news are leaked, Athaliah would destroy that man together with his household
- b- For the infant to be kept, together with his nurse in the house of the Lord for six years without the news being leaked to Athaliah, was only through a divine plan that reveals God's personal interest in the matter.
- c- Keeping the infant in the house of the Lord under the care of the high priest, revealed the plan of God who appointed a specific tribe for priesthood; and another for royalty; with cooperation between the two tribes; by which God proclaims His care for His people spiritually and temporally.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 22

GRANT ME , O LORD, THE SPIRIT OF LEADERSHIP AND CARE

- + Grant me Your Spirit to work in me, O Good Shepherd;
By Your love You shepherd Your people, and deliver Yourself for them;
By Your love, You set out of every child a loving leader;
- + Ahaziah received the throne, when he had no true principles;
He was led and counseled by his evil mother;
She pushed him to evil, and deprived him of being attached to You;
She pushed him to attach to Jehoram, the idol-worshipper
He assumed that , by his alliance with Jehoram he would be secure;

But death chased him, and reproach attached to him

- + His mother Athalia received the throne of her son;
In her love for authority, she killed every male in the house of David;
She killed and felt comfortable; thinking that she became safe and secure;
For no one would compete against her for the throne;
No one would be able to stand before her;
And no one in the entire kingdom would dare to disobey her;
She reigned for six years;
And thought that she is mighty, wise, and a unique leader;
She thought that no one of the house of David would be there to sit on his throne;
And the prophecies about the house of David would never be fulfilled

- + But You, the Good Shepherd saved a one year old infant;
You embraced him in Your holy temple;
You guarded him with Your care, and prepared him to sit on the throne;
You work with the plenty, and with the few; with the grown-up, and with the child;
You pour Your Spirit on Your believers;
To make them bear the spirit of love, care, and leadership

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CHAPTER 23

JOASH THE SON OF AHAZIAH MADE A KING, AND ATHALIAH ASSASSINATED

This episode came in (2 Kings 11: 4 etc.)

The royal system was reformed, and the throne was restored to the house of David in the temple which was built by Solomon the son of David; to enable the priesthood tribe to minister to God. The true history is in the house of worship.

The high priesthood, represented by Jehoiada was closely connected to the kingdom; a bond very obviously shown in the books of the chronicles; although the kingdom and the priesthood were not both given to one person; except to the Lord Christ alone, who is the King of kings and the heavenly High Priest; about whom is said: "*He shall be a priest on His throne*" (Zechariah 6: 13)

1- Jehoiada prepares the people to receive Joash

1 - 10

2- Jehoiada makes Joash appear before the people as king of Judah

11

3- Athaliah who took the throne by force, assassinated

12 - 15

4- The reforms of king Joash

16 – 21

1- JEHOIADA PREPARES THE PEOPLE TO RECEIVE JOASH:

“In the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and made a covenant with the captains of hundreds. Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri” (1)

Those captains of hundred are not mentioned in the book of the kings; but what is mentioned is the presence of royal guards in five divisions (2 Kings 11: 4-8). The five captains of hundred were of the royal guards, who were upset by Athaliah and her animosity against the house of the Lord and the descendants of David. They were most probably on good terms with Jehoiada the priest.

The personality of Jehoiada the priest:

Jehoiada is considered an ideal priest who ministers not to his own account or to that of the people, but to the account of the glory of God; whose example, it is befitting of us to imitate in many aspects:

- a- He was **a man of wisdom**, of good behavior, and of holy life. He kept the infant prince for several years until he was able to appear before the people and the good leaders, who were fed up with the actions of queen Athaliah who took the throne by force. Jehoiada planned for that task and executed it in an amazing secrecy, and in good timing without slothfulness..

- + He gave three features of preaching the word: a flaring zeal; a soul prepared to endure any probability of risks; and a knowledge and wisdom bound together. His love of adventure in his preaching and in his blameless life, would never be of any benefit to him, unless he receives the power of the Spirit, which is apparent in the apostle's

words words: "*that our ministry may not be blamed*" (2 Corinthians 6: 3)

+ It is befitting of the priest to glitter; and to shed light by his good behavior on all people to make them follow his lead. For, in case this light turns into darkness, What will become of the world? It will certainly become desolate.

(St. John Chrysostom)

b- A **man of God** will always feel that he is called to this work by God Himself, who will accompany him in it; for without Him he will not be able to practice his priesthood.

+ Who is he, who is pure, genuine before God, to be worthy of be clothed with fire, and set to minister to its flame?

Who is the man of dust, who is enflamed by Your divinity, to be able to hold this inexpressible flame?

Who is he, who is purified from the filth of this repulsive world; and who acquire such a level of glory, to serve as a priest?

Even if he is a fiery Seraph, he will not be able to offer such perfect sacrifices as those of the apostles.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

c- **A man of influence**; with such a charisma to gather together the leaders, the Levites, and the chief fathers of Israel, once he called them to Jerusalem (2). Being a man of wisdom, love, and given authority from God,

they all attentively listened to him (Ecclesiastes 9: 17)

+ Like a king, he sent them forth as rulers, gave them authority to put in jail or to bring out of it.

(St. John Chrysostom)

d- **A man of great faith:** He was not moved by anyone around him, but was guided by the word of God; sought to work according to the will of God(3); he prepared the little king, not to oppose Athaliah, but “*as the Lord has said*” (3)

+ It is a great judgment under which those who teach may fall; as is clear from the words of the disciple of Christ who says: “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment*” (James 3: 1). For the spiritual gifts are given in abundance to the leaders of the people; according to what the wise Paul wrote to his blessed disciple Timothy, saying: “*May the Lord give you understanding in all things*” (2 Timothy 2: 7); and, “*I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hand*” (see 2 Timothy 1: 6). It is obvious that as much as the Savior of all gives them, the more He demands from them.

What are the virtues He demands from us? Abidance in faith; sound teaching, to be set on a good foundation of hope; perseverance without shaking; unconquerable spiritual power; joy and courage in every good progress. By all that we would become good role models to others in the evangelic life. If we so live, the Lord Christ will grant us the crown by which we praise and give

authority to Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit;
forever, Amen.

(St. Cyril the Great)

e- **A man of worship:** not to practice the rites without understanding; but to seek God by, an in it; In God he would find satiety.

+ The perfect minister of Christ, have no one else beside Christ.

(St. Jerome)

f- **A man of strong will:** and an amazing persistence. He could have been killed, but he worked with the spirit of power without fear.

+ Whoever controls his desires, trains himself to endure, grows to the state of perfection in knowledge, will be equal to angels.

Jehoiada was so enlightened, and shining as the sun in practicing compassion; hasting with a knowledge full of righteousness toward the holy dwelling place through the love of God, the way the apostles did. Those apostles were not chosen for the apostleship, on account of some advantage in their nature; for even Judas was chosen among them, but they could practice the enlightened apostolic life ... to be able to see limitless things. Matthias was not originally one of them, but he showed himself worthy to be an apostle in the place of Judas.

Now, as well, Whoever trains himself on the commandments of the Lord, and lives by a perfect knowledge according the gospel; will be

counted in the body of the chosen apostles. Such a man would be worthy of being a priest in the church, and a true deacon, as long as he works and teaches according to the will of God.. He will not be counted righteous for being ordained a priest; but he gained priesthood for being righteous. For even if he does not get the honor of the great throne here on earth; he will sit together with the twenty-four elders to judge the people, as said by John in the book of the Revelation.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

“And they went throughout Judah and gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah and the chief fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem” (2)

Jehoiada elaborately called all the leaderships -- the military, the civil, and the religious -- to rebel against Athaliah, and to declare Joash a king. The captains of hundreds *“went throughout Judah and gathered the religious leadership (the Levites), and the political (the chief fathers of Israel), and they came to Jerusalem” (2)*

By “Israel” here he means the kingdom of Judah embracing the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and the godly men from the other tribes who departed from the Northern kingdom and joined the Southern kingdom. Jehoiada did not call the heads of the tribes in the northern kingdom; for they would not be trusted on something like that, having forsaken the temple, and rejected the principle of confining the throne to the seed of David.

All that probably happened during the annual celebration of one of the major feasts, when the Jews normally gathered together in Jerusalem; by which Athaliah would not realize that any plot was planned against her..

“Then all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God; and he said to them, ‘Behold the king’s son shall reign, as the Lord has said of the sons of David” (3)

“This is what you shall do: One- third of you entering on the Sabbath, of the priests and the Levites, shall be keeping watch over the doors” (4)

If Jehoiada, in his wisdom and desire for a collective work, gathered together all the leaderships -- the military, the civil, and the religious -- to let all feel that the work concerns all, and not a particular sect; yet he was keen on letting the priests and the Levites surround the king, and keep the statutes concerning the celebration in the temple.

“This is what you shall do” Here he describes the system Jehoiada followed to defend the revolution against Athaliah, and making Joash a king. He divided the guards into three groups: a group to guard the king wherever he goes (7), and two groups to guard the gates and entrances of the house of the Lord and the house of the king.

“One-third shall be at the king’s house, and one-third at the gate of the foundation. All the people shall be in the courts of the house of the Lord” (5)

“But let no one come into the house of the Lord except the priests and those of the Levites who serve. They may go in for they are holy, but all the people shall keep the watch of the Lord” (6)

“And the Levites shall surround the king on all sides, every man with his weapons in his hand, and whoever comes into the house, let him be put to death. You are to be with the king when he comes in and when he goes out” (7)

For fear that the priests of the Baal would probably attack and kill the little king in the temple, Jehoiada provided those surrounding him with weapons to keep them from entering into the temple.

“So the Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded. And each man took his men who were to be on duty on the Sabbath, with those who were going off duty on the Sabbath, for Jehoiada the priest had not dismissed the divisions” (8)

The priests and the Levites were usually divided into divisions, each serves its turn, then is dismissed to be replaced by another division. But now in the present situation, Jehoiada considering it an emergency, he did not dismiss them until the celebration is over, and peace and tranquility prevail on the city.

“And Jehoiada the priest gave to the captains of hundred the spears and the large and the small shields which had been king David’s, that were in the temple of God” (9)

“Then he set all the people, every man with his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and by the temple, all around the king” (10)

2- JEHOIADA MAKES JOASH APPEAR BEFORE THE PEOPLE AS KING OF JUDAH:

“And they brought out the king’s son, put the crown on him, gave him the testimony, and made him king. Then Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, ‘Long live the king’” (11)

It was a great joy for the people to see the little kid, the son of David stand on the podium; for then there was no more despair; and they ran around rejoicing to see what they did not expect to see.

In the ‘Tergom’ it came that they brought the little kid and put the royal crown that David took from over the head of the king of the Ammonites, adorned with an attractive precious stone, with inscriptions expressing the greatness and honor of the name of ‘Jehovah’, that weighed about one talent of gold. Once the people saw that the little Joash endured its weight, they knew that he is a descendant of David, and they instantly made him king. Then Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, ‘Long live the king’ (11).

When David killed the mighty Goliath, he took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was around his arm, and presented them to king Saul (2 Samuel 1: 10). As to the testimony that was given to the king, it was claimed to be a scroll of a book with the law written on it (Deuteronomy 17: 18), The king used to receive the scroll with both his hands, and put it over his head before he reads it, as a sign of submission and honor to what is written on it.

3- ATHALIA WHO TOOK THE THRONE BY FORCE, ASSASSINATED:

“Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people in the temple of the Lord” (12)

Queen Athaliah entered into the temple, assuming that no one will dare to stand in her way.

“And when she looked, there was the king standing by the pillar at the entrance, and the leaders and the trumpeters were by the king. Here were all the people of the land, rejoicing and playing trumpets; also the singers with instruments of music, and those who led in the praise. So Athaliah tore her clothes and said, ‘Treason, treason’” (13)

Not expecting to see any of the house of David survived the slaughter she committed, Athaliah saw the little king crowned and anointed, sitting on the bronze platform made by Solomon, put beside the podium (the pillar). She then *“tore her clothes and said, ‘Treason, treason’ (13).*

It is befitting of the righteous not to gloat on the perdition of the wicked; on account of that the righteous should bear the will of their Father, *“who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2: 4)*; but it is befitting of them to rejoice instead in the destruction of the authority of evil and oppression, so that the weak would not be offended; and to rejoice in the incorruptible glory of God.

While the righteous would find the chance to reveal the vanity of evil, its weakness, and its non-continuity; and to ridicule of the false wisdom and the craftiness of the wicked; the righteous would also rejoice in the collapse of the devil and his kingdom, the destruction of sin and not of the sinner. For the righteous knows nothing but love, even for the sinners.

+ *“The righteous see it and rejoice” (Psalm 107: 42).* The righteous will not rejoice in seeing the wicked sin, and destroying themselves, for if they do, they are no more counted as righteous. The Pharisee lost his righteousness for counting himself more exalted than the tax-collector, saying *“God, I thank You that I am not like other men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax-collector” (Luke 18: 11).*

“Then Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds who were set over the army, and said to them, Take her outside under guard, and slay with the sword whoever follows her’. For the priest said, ‘Do not kill her in the house of the Lord’”
(14)

.Wisely, Jehoiada was careful not to have the wicked Athaliah killed in the house of the Lord; for the place is holy and should not be defiled. Yet, at the same time, for fear that this tyrant woman if left alive, would kill the little king; he therefore commanded slaying her by the sword, together with whoever follows her..

“So they seized her, and she went by way of the entrance of the Horse Gate into the king’s house, and they killed her there” (15)

+ Whoever contend in iniquity will not have a portion among the eternal,

(St. Anthony the Great)

+ *“You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever and ever”* (Psalm 9: 5). You utterly destroy them, You uproot them from their origin; You blot out their name and memory ... *“They are chased out of the world”* (Job 18: 18); and in another text, “their memory goes away together with them”. . Here he means utter destruction, for the sake of their intense evil; a sign of God’s care is that he does that not in secret, to make them an example before all

(St. John Chrysostom)

This chaff will not destroy the wheat of the Lord. "*The elect of the Lord, gathered together from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*" (Matthew 24: 31), will never perish. Those who cry out saying: "*Help Lord, for the godly man ceases; for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men*" (Psalm 12: 1); the Lord responses saying: "*But he who endures to the end shall be saved*" (Matthew 24: 13).

+ "*Then the earth shook and trembled*" (Psalm 18: 7); So the sinner did when the Son of Man was glorified; and "*the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken*" (Psalm 18: 7). For the hope of the proud in this life was shaken; the hope of the proud in the temporal blessings are no more established in the hearts of men; it also quaked and were shaken, before the Lord's anger.

(St. Augustine)

+ "*The mountain melt like wax*" (Psalm 97: 5). I believe that the mountains here are the hosts of the devil, namely, surely the proud men. Such a fire consumes, not the lowly (the humble), but only the haughty. For it is well known that lightening rarely affect those in the valley, but only those high on the mountains.

(St. Jerome)

According to the historian Josephus, Athalia was killed at the 'Mule Gate', south-east of the temple, close to the 'Horse Gate' in the valley of the Brook Kidron, which, at that time was counted as a defiled place.

2- THE REFORMS OF THE KING:

"Then Jehoiada made a covenant between himself, the people, and the king, that they should be the Lord's people" (16)

As a representative of God, the people, and the king, Jehoiadah was keen on starting the reform, by the renewal of the covenant between him and God, after Athaliah corrupted the worship of God, and did her best to replace it with idol-worship. He was keen on making a 'triple covenant'; namely on renewing the covenant between the Lord and the king; between the Lord and the people; and between the king and the people (2 Kings 11: 17); The goal of the renewal of the covenant was for the people to be *"the Lord's people"*; so that the king, the priest, and the people would not seek their own glory, but that of the Lord.

"And all the people went to the temple of Baal, and tore it down. They broke in pieces its altars and images, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars" (17)

The worse of what Athaliah did was to walk in the way of her evil mother Isabel, bringing forth, and supporting idol-worship.

According to the law, the priests of the idols should be killed, on account of that they seduce the people to worship the idols, and to practice their abominations (Deuteronomy 7: 5-6).

“Mattan”, most probably the foremost priest of Baal, who came together with Athaliah from Samaria; was close to Jeroboam, and his right hand in bringing forth the idol-worship to Jerusalem. He was called ‘Maathan’ by Josephus.

“And Jehoiada appointed the oversight of the house of the Lord to the hand of the priests, the Levites, whom David had assigned in the house of the Lord, to offer the burnt offerings of the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was established by David” (18)

Because the temple was neglected in the days of the evil kings; there was a mixture between the worship of the living God and idol-worship; and the system of the temple was corrupted; Johoiada the high priest did the following:

- a- He appointed the priests to offer the burnt offerings, as it is written in the law of Moses.
- b- He appointed the Levites to sing praise to the Lord, as it was established by David, the prophet and the king; as worship was bound to rejoicing (Romans 5: 11)
- c- He set the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the Lord (19); to keep anyone unclean from entering into it.

“And he set the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the Lord, so that no one who was in anyway unclean should enter”

“Then he took the captains of hundreds, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the peoples of the land, and brought the king down from the house of the Lord; and they

went through the Upper Gate to the king’s house, and set the king on the throne of the kingdom” (20)

“So all the peoples of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet, for they had slain Athaliah with the sword” (21)

What is obvious in all those reforms was the prevalence of the true spirit of joy, together with the inner peace. So it is, when the Son of David reigns upon our hearts, the joy of the Spirit will never forsake us; and we shall enjoy the deposit of heaven.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 23

REIGN, O LORD, IN MY HEART, AND KILL EVERY EVIL IN IT

- + Athaliah assumed that she established her reign;
When she killed all the heirs to the throne;
By her tyranny she could move the leaderships like pieces of chess;
She assumed that there is no God to fear.

- + In the worship of Baal she found her pleasure;
She set a goddess out of herself, before whom nobody could stand;
She despised all Your promises to the house of David;
She planned to let no one of the house of David left alive.

- + Yet, Your care is amazing, so are Your ordinances;
You moved Your priest Jehoiada and his wife to take care of a child,
thought to be forgotten;
And when it was time for him to sit on the throne;
The military, religious, and civil leaderships, moved with joy;
Athaliah was killed at the 'Mule Gate';
And Mattan the priest of Baal was killed together with her.

+ You, O Word of God, incarnated and became a child;
You brought terror to the devil and all his hosts;
You came to sit on a throne of the hearts of mankind;
To set Your kingdom inside them;
To turn the men of dust almost into heavenlies;
And to let men join the heavenly choir;
Glory be to You, O Savior of mankind.



CHAPTER 24

THE PERVERSION OF KING JOASH

This chapter confirms the close bond between the royal system of the house of David and the Leviticus priesthood system.

As long as Joash was under the supervision of Jehoiada the godly high priest, he walked with an upright heart; and cared for the temple and worship. But after the death of Jehoiada, under the influence of wicked counselors, he apostatized from faith.

1- Joash repairs the temple

1 - 14

2- Restoration of worship in the temple

15 - 16

1- The apostasy of king Joash, and God sends prophets to warn him

17 - 19

2- Joash commands the Killing of Zechariah the prophet

20 - 22

3- Aram (Syria) invades Judah

23 - 24

4- Joash assassinated and buried

25 - 27

1- JOASH REPAIRS THE TEMPLE:

As there was no king in Judah; while Athalia took the throne by force, the high priest and the priests had a prominent role, and the army and the people were on Jehoiada's side. At the beginning of his reign, Joash walked under the guidance of Jehoiada the godly high priest, whose guidance was not a heavy burden on him, but poured on him and the people happiness and joy. It was amazing that Joash has shown such a great zeal to reform the temple, probably more than Jehoiada himself, who, for some time, was more preoccupied with the inner reform of the souls, up to his last breath.

“Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba” (1)

“Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest” (2)

“And Jehoiada took for him two wives, and he had sons and daughters” (3)

We may probably assume that Jehoiada's care to set the kingdom in the house of David, was a pay back of what David and Solomon have done in building the temple, organizing the worship, and everything that concern the priesthood work; Yet Jehoiada had an extremely close relationship with the young king, even in the private matters. Through his counsel, the king married only two wives; according to what is written: *“Neither shall he (the king) multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away”* (Deuteronomy 17: 17); in which Solomon fell: *“King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh; women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his god, as was the heart of his father David”* (1 Kings 11: 1-6).

“Now it happened after this that Joash set his heart on repairing the house of the Lord” (4)

Feeling that the 130 years old house of the Lord was where he was raised, and the stronghold in which he found refuge from death, Joash had deep affection toward it; and put in his heart to repair it, after being for so long neglected by many of the kings of Judah, particularly in the days of Jehoram and Athaliah. Joash experienced the sweetness of dwelling in the house of the Lord, and the blessings of encountering the Lord in His own house. For whoever ascends to the house of the Lord with longing to have an intimate relationship with Him, would be as though he ascended up to heaven itself.

+ You know, beloved brethren, that the song of Ascent (to the house of the Lord) is the song of our ascent; which would not be possible by the physical feet, but by the feelings of the heart.

+ The psalms of ascent teach us how to ascend and progress in our walk with God. The Psalmist calls us, by the Holy Spirit, to ascend by the heart; namely to have a true increase in our holy desire; which is greater than the search for the 'spiritual feelings'.

We start by faith in the truth of the unseen world of God, and the abiding foundation of His kingdom. This will kindle in us a living hope of being the children of the heavenly kingdom. And that in turn would make us pour God's love on others.

That will increase our desire to have the experience of the eternal presence of God now, as well as in the limitless life to come. That is what the expression "*we ascend*" means..

+ While moaning in our journey, we shall rejoice once we reach the city. But we shall have company on the road; of those who, having already seen that particular city, exhort us to run toward it. Rejoicing to see such company, the psalmist says: "*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'*" (Psalm 122: 1).

+ Although you are still on the road, put before your eyes that you already stand there, and unceasingly rejoice together with the angel; as though what is written: "*Blessed are those who dwell in Your house. They will still be praising You*" (Psalm 4) has been realized in you..

+ Our presence in the church is a cry-out to the divine majesty, a demonstration of our submission to God, and our thanksgiving for the free grace He had poured on us, while still being His enemies, adversaries, and not submitting to Him; having sent His only begotten Son from heaven to shed His precious blood, and to deliver His pure body to redeem us. We remember those glorified passions, and make these beloved and revered memorials, under the veil of the nature of bread and wine, as the secrets of the delivered body and the shed precious blood; partaking of these unique graces, unified in these divine glories.

(St John Chrysostom)

“Then he gathered the priests and the Levites, and said to them, ‘Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that you do it quickly’. However the Levites did not do it quickly” (5)

Although the house of the Lord was in Jerusalem, yet it represented the divine presence in the whole kingdom; and being in the midst of the people wherever they are, it was the source of blessing to all. Intending to let everyone partake of the expenses of the continuous repair and maintenance along the years, the king wished for all to enjoy the blessing of the sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, the Shepherd of all and the Care-taker of their salvation.

It so seems from the way the king spoke to the Levites, that his zeal to repair the house of the lord was strong, except for saying “*the house of **your** God*”, instead of saying ‘... of our God’, which tells us that the zeal of the young king to repair the house of the Lord, only touched the renewal and appearance, and not the personal relationship that is more befitting of him, as well as of the leaders and the people with the Lord. This reminds us of how the leaders and rulers said to Jeremiah the prophet: “*Pray for our sake to the Lord **your** God*” (Jeremiah 42: 2, 3).

Seeing how slothful the priests and the Levites were in repairing the house of the Lord, the king took the matter upon himself to fulfill this task:

- a. He gathered the priests and the Levites, and motivated them to go out to the all the cities of Judah, to let the whole people contribute to the task of repairing the house of the Lord.
- b. Although the Levites did not oppose the king's command, yet they *"did not do it quickly"* (5).
- c. The king admonished Jehoiada the high priest on the slothfulness of the Levites; and reminded him of what the evil Athaliah did to desolate the house of the Lord (7)
- d. He did not stop at admonishment and provocation, , but moved to act positively, namely he made a chest and set it outside at the gate of the house of the Lord to collect donations; The leaders and all the people rejoiced to contribute until the chest was full.(10)
- e. The king cooperated together with the priests; the scribe of the king and the steward of the high priest used to empty the chest and bring it back to its place on a daily basis.
- f. When the task was finished, the remaining gold and silver was used to make articles for the house of the Lord. Burnt offerings were offered in the house of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada.

"So the king called Jehoiada the chief priest, and said to him, 'Why had you not required the Levites to bring it from Judah and from Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the Lord and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness?' " (6)

He sought from everyone who reached twenty years of age to offer half a shekel to the house of the Lord, not more by the rich, nor less from the poor,, to let everyone perceive that they are all equal in the sight of the Lord (Exodus 30: 12-15)

“For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God, and had also presented all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord to the Baals” (7)

“Then at the king’s commandment they made a chest, and set it outside at the gate of the house of the Lord” (8)

“And they made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to bring to the Lord the collection that Moses the servant of God had imposed on Israel in the wilderness” (9)

Making all contribute equally to the expenses of the tabernacle (or of the temple) without discernment between the rich and the poor, refers to that the offering, although bearing a collective spirit, yet it also bears a personal relationship between every believer and his God. The ministry to the tabernacle (or to the temple) is a ministry of the whole congregation, yet without letting the believer lose his identity as a living member with a direct relationship with God; and, at the same time, through his unity with the congregation.

“Then the leaders and all the people rejoiced, brought their contributions, and put them into the chest until all had given” (10)

“So it was, at that time, when the chest was brought to the king’s official by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, that the king’s scribe and the

high priest’s officer came and emptied the chest, and took it and returned it to its place. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance” (11)

“Then the king and Jehoiada gave it to those who did the work of the service of the house of the Lord; and they hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the Lord, and

also those who worked in iron and bronze to restore the house of the Lord” (12)

“So the workmen labored, and the work was completed by them; they restored the house of God to its original condition, and they reinforced it” (13)

“When they had finished they brought the rest of the money before the King and Jehoiada; they made from it articles for the house of the Lord, articles for serving and offering, spoons and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the Lord continually all the days of Jehoiada” (14)

2- RESTORATION OF THE WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE:

“But Jehoiada grew old and full of days, and he died; he was one hundred and thirty years when he died” (15)

Being one hundred and thirty years old when he died, Jehoiada seemed to be born in the days of Solomon, and was a contemporary of six kings. He adopted the little infant Joash, and hid him for as long as six years, then let him sit on the throne when he reached seven years of age.

“And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and His house” (16)

He was honored by the king, the leaders, and the people, *“because he has done good in Israel, to God, and to His house’ .”* *“And they buried him among the kings” (16)*. He was counted by all as a king; on account of his embracing Joash, who seemed to be of weak personality; and running the affairs of the kingdom in his name. Saying *“done good in Israel” (16)* is because the kingdom of Judah came to represent Israel; while the rest of the tribes have gone astray from the Lord.

3- THE APOSTASY OF THE KING AND WARNING HIM:

“Now after the death of Jehoiada the leaders came and bowed down to the king. And the king listened to them” (17)

As it came in the ‘Tergom’, the leaders of Judah, after the death of Jehoiada, came and bowed down to Joah, and seduced him to receive their idols.. Unfortunately, once Jehoiada was buried, who was the faithful counselor of the king, every good thought in the king was also buried with him; and Joash forgot all what the good priest has done to him, how he kept him safe in the temple until it was time for him to sit on the throne when he reached 7 years of age.

That behavior by king Joash after the death of his spiritual guide, reveals the secret of the care of the church for the proper choice of the spiritual guide.

- + I shed a flood of tears on my miserable life; I prayed to find a spiritual guide who can plant in me the principles of true godliness ... My whole preoccupation was to reform my ethics, that were corrupted through long mixing with an evil company. Then I started to read the gospel; and found out that there is no way to reach perfection other than to sell everything I got, and give a portion to the poor; and to forsake all the worldly ambitions of life, to spare my soul of anything that may disturb her purity.
- + There have to be one chosen leader, chosen as the best of the bunch, through an elaborate inquiry of his life, personality, and good behavior. Yet his age have to be taken into consideration; on account of that the older man gets, the more honor he deserves. Consequently, the brethren are committed to obey him in submission and humility.
- + As it is befitting of the congregation to obey the head and to submit to him; It would then be of utmost importance for him who is chosen to have the kind of life to be a role model in every virtue for those who look up to him;

to be, according to the apostle Paul: *“above reproach, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, and able to teach”* (1 Timothy 3: 2). I believe, therefore, that it would be crucial to inquire all about his way of life; even disregarding what concerns his age; for it so happen sometimes, that childish features go hand in hand with grey hair and wrinkles of the face. Inquiring about him, above anything else, should be to know whether his personality and ethics have grown as is befitting; so that all what he says or does become a law and principle to which the congregation are committed.

Concerning the monastic life, the leaders should be chosen according to the principle shown by the apostle Paul, saying: *“Those who served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus”* (See 2 Thessalonians 3)

- + Certain animals give their life a particular political concept; (if we consider the work of politics is to direct the individual energies toward a collective goal). In the life of bees we notice that all work under the supervision of one head or its deputy; and would never go to the fields to collect nectar except under the leadership of their head.

St. Basil the Great)

“Therefore they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served wooden images and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and upon Jerusalem because of their trespass” (18)

Adopting the role of evil counselors, the leaders of Judah started to flatter the king, and to show to him their loyalty; and dared to congratulate him on the death of Jehoiada, whom they counted as has been a guardian over the king; and

provoked him to set himself free of the submission he lived through during the life of the old priest, to be able to enjoy life through plunging in pagan abominations. He did not perceive that they were provoking him to servitude to evil desires, corruption, and shameful kind of life.

The leaders of Judah most probably presented to the king a direct or a hidden request, which they could not dare to present it during the life of Jehoiada.. They requested to re-erect the pillars and the idols that were destroyed at the beginning of the reign of Joash; and proclaimed that they were not willing any more to be committed to the ancient and difficult rites of worship in the temple. The king, not only allowed them to do that, but even partook of their endeavor to revive the pagan worship.

“Yet God sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the Lord; and they testified against them, but they would not listen” (19)

If the devil has stirred the leaders of the Jews to go back to the pagan worship, yet the Lord on his side, although He did not commit them by force to the sound worship, He sent to them prophets to rebuke them on their iniquity, and to warn them against the consequences of evil and sin, In every era there are witnesses to the Lord who proclaim the divine truth, and who warn the wicked against the perdition that awaits them...

4- JOASH COMMANDS THE KILLING OF ZECHARIAH THE PROPHET:.

“Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them, ‘Thus says God, ‘Why do you trespass the commandments

of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also had forsaken you” (20)

As the Spirit of the Lord came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, he stood above the people who still did not forsake the temple; and although have started worshipping the idols; yet they gathered together in the temple during certain feasts..

In the ‘Tergom’ it came that, seeing the iniquity of the king and the people, and how they burned incense before the idols in the house of the Lord on the day of atonement; and how they banned the priests of the Lord from offering the burnt offerings, the sacrifices, the daily offerings and services, according to what came in the law of Moses, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada stood above the people, and said to them ... (20)

“So they conspired against him, and at the commandment of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord” (21)

The priest uttered the divine truth very clearly, not in a language that would stir up anger; he did not rebuke the king nor the leaders of the Jews, who, instead of returning to God, they conspired against hi, and at the commandment of the king, who counted the words uttered by the priest a personal challenge against him, they stoned him to death. The author of the book did not refer to any trial before a court of justice, on a charge of treason or blasphemy; but, because of a probable stir-up by the mob, provoked by the followers of the leaders, the king condemned him to be stoned to appease the anger of the mob.

What a miserable king!; forsaking God, the devil occupied his heart to turn him into a tyrant who commands the stoning of the prophet and priest of God; and the son of the one who put him on the throne.

He committed a horrible crime on several aspects:

- 1- He was stoned him despite being a godly and a holy priest, in the house of the Lord. It so seems that he was the same 'Zechariah' mentioned in (Luke 11: 51), who was called 'Son of Berechiah' (Matthew 23: 35), probably quoting (Isaiah 8: 2).
- 2- It is amazing that the king commanded stoning him in the house of the Lord, while Jehoiads the priest, the father of Zechariah refused to have the evil Athaliah killed in the house of the Lord, although she was an adversary of God, corruptor of the temple, and a challenger to the house of David; but sought instead to take her out of the house of he Lord and kill her somewhere else.
- 3- The king forgot how the father of that priest has risked his own life for the sake of keeping the throne for him; and did his best to keep the throne in the house of David
- 4- The king forgot the covenant which he made with God on the day of his enthronement.
- 5- The horror of this crime is apparent in being against someone who has been martyred for the sake of his faithfulness to God and his country; and who is the son of Jehoiada who did unaccountable reforms in Judah; and who was like a father to Joash.
- 6- According to the Jewish tradition, that event of killing Zechariah the priest, represents seven transgressions: It was a crime of killing a priest, a prophet, and a judge; shedding of innocent blood; defiling the house of the Lord; committed on a Sabbath, and on the day of atonement.

"Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son; and as he died he said, 'Let the lord look on and repay'" (22)

Joash, who started his life as a king with a flaring zeal on the house of the Lord, he, in denial commands the killing of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada in the house of the Lord; who as he died he cried out: *“Let the Lord look on and repay”* (22); a cry-out of a broken down law. ... Hearing this cry-out, God allowed the army of Aram to come against Joash, *“in a small company of men, but the Lord delivered a very great army into their hands”* (24)

The priest did not seek revenge against the king, but prophesied what will dwell upon him, by saying to those who stoned him: *“Let the Lord look on and repay”*.

It is to be remembered that Zechariah was of royal blood; for his mother was the king's aunt (22: 11), who, together with her husband Jehoiada the high priest played a great role to save the life of the infant king, and to prepare him to sit on the throne, risking their own lives to be killed by the tyrant Athaliah.

5- ARAM (SYRIA) INVADES JUDAH:

“So it happened in the spring of the year that the army of Syria came up against him, and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the leaders of the people from

among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus”
(23)

“or the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men; but the Lord delivered a very great army into their hand, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers.

So they executed judgment against Joash” (24)

By that, the prophecy of the martyr priest has been completely realized: an invasion against the land, destruction of its leaders, and carrying a great spoil to Damascus.

6- JOASH ASSASINATED AND BURIED:

“And when they had withdrawn from him (for they left him severely wounded), his own servants conspired against him because of the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed. And they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings” (25)

Rebelling against the king of Aram, Joash drank from the same cup of evil which he himself filled; Even though he did not respond to the chastisement that dwelt upon him by repentance and the return to God:

- a- God delivered a very great army of Judah into the hands of a small company of men of Aram
- b- Hazael, king of Syria took all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the house of the king (27).
- c- Although in the prime of his life, Joash was inflicted with multiple ailments, whether mental or physical, that dwelt upon him one after another.
- d- He was assassinated on his bed by his servants who conspired against him because of the blood of Zecharia and his brothers the sons of Jehoiada (25)
- e- Having restored the pagan worship in Judah, provoked the people to idol-worship; and to enter into marriages with pagan women, Joash was assassinated by two of the sons of those pagan women; According to the book, those who conspired against him, one was the son of an Ammonite mother, and the other the son of a Moabite mother.
- f- Joash, who, while in the seventh year of his life, was enthroned a king in the house of the Lord with joy and great glory, did not even get the honor of being buried when he died in the tombs of the king; While Jehoiada the high priest was buried in the tombs of the kings; on account of that he

spoiled his name and honor; and as the psalmist says: *“Let them not be written with the righteous”* (Psalm 69: 28).

- + It is God who raises the kings up, and who brings them down from their thrones.
- + Woe to the leader who misuses his authority, and goes far in his licentiousness and selfishness; for punishment would await him by divine Judge; which would be as harsh as how he treated the saints of God.

(St. Basil the Great)

“These are the ones who conspired against him: Zabad the son of Shimeath the Ammonitess, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabitess” (26)

Those who conspired against him were most probably members of the royal court, and the subject of trust by the king and his entourage, to have such access to him. But although the book said that they were the sons of pagan mothers, yet it did not mention whether their fathers were Jews or foreigners.

“Now concerning his sons, and the many oracles about him, and the repairing of the house of God, indeed they are written in the annals of the book of the kings. Then Amaziah his son reigned in his place” (27)

Having been warned by the priest, whom he condemned to death by stoning, Joash bore the fruit of his evil, and came to be an example of whoever perverts from God; as it was said about the wife of ‘Lot’: *“Remember the wife of Lot...”* (Genesis 19: 26)..

“**The annals**” of the book of the kings. We have already talked about this term in our commentary on (2 Chronicles 13: 22).

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 24

SAVE ME, O LORD, FROM MYSELF!

- + Joash, the infant and the young man, could work with diligence;
When he found in Jehoiada the high priest a father, a counselor, and a support;
And when he saw in Your house an icon of heaven;
His heart desire was to let the whole people and the leaders partake of the expenses of repairing Your holy house;
He was then the successful leader who walked in uprightness in Your sight;
By You he became the source of joy to the people and to the leaders
He honored his spiritual father until the day he died.

- + But, after the death of his spiritual father, he gave his back and not his face to God;
When the leaders came and bowed down before him, he bowed down before their idols;
He disobeyed the Lord, and disregarded the divine commandment;
His real enemy was his own depths that perverted to evil;
Forsaking You and setting himself a god, he sought the temporal honor;
He opened the gates of his heart wide before the hosts of darkness.

- + How difficult for man to discover his own deception!

It is much easier for us to perceive and expose the faults of others;
But it is difficult to perceive the truth about ourselves;
Let Your Holy Spirit work in us to help us discover our own weaknesses.

- + How miserable and bitter!
He set his heart a throne for the devil;
He lost even the general human nature;
To turn into a violent demon;
He did not listen to Zechariah, as a man of God;
And as the son of the man who risked his own life to make him a king;
He condemned him to be stoned to death;;
Because his own heart turned into stone.

- + He shed the innocent blood of a righteous man;
For which God chastised him by an army of few men from Aram;
They destroyed all the leaders of his people who deceived him;
Then they sent a great spoil to the king in Damascus.

- + Even after his and his army's collapse, he did not return to God;
In his stubbornness he remained a sojourner from the Lord, the true God;
Two foreigners assassinated him in his own bed;
And his people were so offended by him to deny him burial in the tombs of
the kings;

- + O Lord, save me from my own self; lest it perverts;
Grant me to be attached to You, and never to forsake You;
Let me feel Your presence and Your love in my depths;
Keep my hands from stretching to violence;
And keep me from bearing denial toward Your children and Your
ministers;
Do not let Your grace forsake me.

CHAPTER 25

AMAZIAH, KING OF JUDAH

Much of what came here was mentioned in (2 kings 14), yet with some important additions.

Amaziah the son of Joash started his reign with justice, wisdom, and keeping the law of the Lord; but, unfortunately, after his victory on the Edomites, getting haughty and boastful of his strength and might; he fell into the worship of the idols of the Edomites; and the Lord forsook him.

Foolishly he entered into a battle against Israel his brother; and was defeated before him; completed his days in disgrace; they conspired against him and assassinated him (27).

1- Amaziah avenges the murder of his father	1 - 4
2- Amaziah's obedience of the Lord	5 - 10
3- Amaziah's conquest on the Edomites	11 - 13
4- Amaziah worships the idols of the Edomites	14 - 16
5- Amaziah challenges the king of Israel	17 - 24
6- Amaziah's sorrowful end	25 - 28

1- AMAZIAH AVENGES THE MURDER OF HIS FATHER:

“Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem” (1)

“And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a loyal heart” (2)

“Not with a loyal heart”; Although he did what was right in the sight of the Lord; namely, although he worshipped the Lord, and set the worship in the temple, yet not with a loyal heart. The Holy Book did not disregard Amaziah’s good deeds; but because he did them not with a loyal heart, he soon perverted to idol-worship.

He hired one hundred thousand mighty men of valor from Israel, without seeking the counsel of the Lord. But having listened to the rebuke of the prophet of God on resorting to Israel, the Lord rewarded him by giving him conquest on the children of Seir. But after his conquest he brought the idols of Seir, and worshipped them, although they have not saved the children of Seir from the hand of Amaziah himself. Instead of giving thanks to the Lord on his conquest, and of destroying those helpless idols, he forsook God and worshipped them. And when the prophet rebuked him on worshipping the idols, he did not repent, but threatened to kill the prophet.

The book did not tell us why God allowed the hired men of Israel to destroy the cities of Judah, to kill three thousand of their inhabitants, and to take much spoil. But it was most probably for the sake of the lack of uprightness of Amaziah’s heart; Or despite his apparent obedience of the prophet, yet, in his depths he was grumbling; Many contemporaries do good works, and care to help others; but not with a loyal heart that longs to the eternal heavenly life.

+ In a pure heart, the divine portrait of nature is shown in its beauty.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

+ Where to will my heart escape from my heart? Where to shall I escape from my soul?

(St. Augustine)

+ Let the way of the Lord abide in our hearts; taking into consideration how great and spacious is man's heart, as though it is a world by itself, not according to its physical size, but according to the power that gives it the possibility to accommodate such a great knowledge of the truth. Set therefore the way of the Lord in your hearts through befitting life, and good and perfect works; for that way will keep your life upright; and will let the words of the Lord reach you unhindered.

(The scholar Origen)

"Now it was so when the kingdom was established for him, that he executed his servants who had murdered his father king" (3)

"However he did not execute their children, but did as it is written in the law, in the book of Moses, here the Lord commanded, saying, 'The fathers shall not be put to death for their

children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall die for his own sin" (4)

Although Amaziah started his reign with uprightness, yet not with a loyal heart; for he did not remove the high places, though he himself did not offer sacrifices on them. And although he committed himself to the law (Deuteronomy 24: 16) by not executing the children of the murderers of his father, yet he did not do it in faith that God is capable to save with many as with a few; as He did when He saved king Asa who killed one million men of Zerah the Ethiopian. And Amaziah

hired one hundred thousand men of valor from Israel without seeking the lord's counsel, for which the man of God came to rebuke him, because God was not with Israel.

2- AMAZIAH'S OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD:

*“Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together and set over them captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, according to their fathers' houses, throughout all Judah and Benjamin;
and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them to be three hundred thousand choice men, able to go to war, who could handle spear and shield” (5)*

With wisdom, Amaziah set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, according to their fathers' houses; so that all would feel that the soldiers and the leaders of a company, all belong to the same tribe, bound by the spirit of brotherhood and friendship.

To attack the Edomites who have rebelled against the kingdom of Judah long time before, Amaziah gathered together three hundred thousand choice men from Judah and Benjamin, able to go to war. Six years before that, Jehoshaphat could gather together four times as many (2 Chronicles 17: 14-19); But it was sin that weakened the people and the army, and corrupted their mentalities.

Wars, to a certain extent weakened the army (2 Chronicles 21: 8, 16; 24: 23-34); but to be added to that was the impact of the weakness of the kingdom on the army. According to the wisdom of Solomon: *“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”* (Proverb 14: 34). All along the eras, history testifies that the nations as well as the individuals, are exalted by righteousness, and destroyed by the corruption of evil. Although nations often boast their military

might and possibilities, yet history keeps on testifying to the power and might of righteousness.

+ We find in the Holy Book no concrete definition of the term “righteousness”; But the pure heart is certainly the righteousness of man.

(St. Anthony the Great)

Sin destroys armies, and makes man lose his authority and eternity; even if he is a king.

+ Lies and partiality are not allowed in the court of ultimate judgment;
There, even the works and deeds of the rulers are followed and exposed;
There, the ranks are removed, and the rulers are judged the same way as the subjects;
There, the robes of the rulers are torn off, and they stand naked, with exposed necks like those of the weak;
There, no king with a crown is seen; nor a ruler with authority;
There, the masters and the poor stand alike; and it is only the chief justice who commands;
There, all the previous unjust verdicts will be re-examined to put aright;
There, the crowns, and thrones, fall down;
There, unless their works are upright, the rulers will stand in reproach because of their deeds.

+ O soul!, beloved by her Lord, ... Who has led you astray? Who scoffed you? Who seduced you with evil desires?

Who brought you from the spirituality down to the lowliness of slaves?

You are the daughter of the free; ... You are the daughter of the King;
You are the daughter of the Light;Why are you clothed with such dark color of
the night?

(St. (Mar Jacob El-Serougi)

- + Sins cause a greater harm to the soul, than that of maggots to the body. Even though, we cannot perceive the urgency and importance of getting purified of them; like a drunkard who cannot feel the abhorrent taste of wine; which is easily felt otherwise. Whoever reverently lives can recognize the mire and the corruption; contrary to whoever lives in evil, who would be like a drunkard, who cannot realize how sick he is. This is the grave danger of sin, it does not let those fallen in it perceive the seriousness of their condition; like those who lay in mire and think they enjoy fragrant spices; hence they have no desire to set themselves free. Looking at the maggots working in them, as though they are precious stones; they have no desire to kill them; but they rather nourish and double them, until they bring them forth to the maggots in the life to come.

. *“He also hired one hundred thousand mighty men of valor from Israel for one hundred talents of silver” (6)*

Amaziah was foolish in doing that, for not seeking the counsel of the Lord through one of his prophets; and because he did not learn from that the worship of Baal entered into Judah through its attachment to Israel.

It is obvious that the silver paid by king Amaziah to the king of Israel, was put in the treasury of the state of Israel, and not to the men of valor as a price of going through the risk of death in battle.

“But a man of God came to him, saying, ‘O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the Lord is not with Israel – not with any of the children of Ephraim” (7)

It is also obvious that, not seeking the counsel of the Lord, Amaziah did not trust in God who can work with the few as He does with many; and did not take into consideration that Israel’s perversion to idol-worship, resulted in that *“The Lord is not with Israel, not with any of the children of Ephraim” (7)*. Therefore, what benefit would be expected from those with whom God Himself proclaimed that He is not on their side? ... While idol-worship prevailed in Israel, Ephraim was the headquarters of that worship.

“But if you go, be gone! Be strong in battle! Even so, God shall make you fall before the enemy; for God has power to help and to overthrow” (8)

Saying here: *"Be gone! Be strong in battle!"* was a kind of mockery; meaning: However strong you may be, God will let you fall by not being with you. God considered resorting to Israel, His opponents, a direct challenge against Him.

"Then Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall I do about the hundred talents which I have given to the troops of Israel?' And the man of God answered, 'The Lord is able to give you much more than this'" (9)

Amaziah gave an excuse for not being able to reverse his decision, the huge sum of money he paid for the service of the mighty men of valor; But the man of God made it clear to him that *"the Lord is able to give him much more than this"* (9). And that the help that God would provide is greater than whatever money he paid.

"So Amaziah discharged the troops that had come to him from Ephraim, to go back home. Therefore their anger was greatly aroused against Judah, and they returned home with great anger" (10)

It is amazing that God has actually restored it to Amaziah, by granting him conquest over Edom; and restored the same sum of money to Amaziah's grandson Jotham (27: 5).

Amaziah prospered by his obedience to the Lord, discharging about one quarter of his army, after being set for battle, not caring for the anger of his allies, for he has got God's pleasure and help; *"Their anger was greatly aroused against Judah"*; for they counted it as an insulting rejection against them, as though they are not worthy of military service. Besides, hoping to go back to their land carrying a plenty of spoil from Edom. The king's decision was an insult to their reputation and a loss of their gains;

3- AMAZIAH'S CONQUEST OVER THE EDMITES:

"Then Amaziah strengthened himself, and leading his people, he went to the Valley of Salt and killed ten thousand of the people of Seir"
(11)

"The Valley of the Salt" is a narrow and very sloping valley south of the Dead Sea.

"And the children of Judah took captive another ten thousand alive, brought them to the top of the rock and cast them down from the top of the rock, so that they all were dashed in pieces" (12)

Such viciousness used to be the nature of wars between the Israelites and the Edomites.

"But as for the soldiers of the army which Amaziah had discharged, so that they would not go with him to battle, they raided the cities of Judah from Samaria to Beth Horon, killed three thousand in them, and took much spoil" (13)

Those discharged men of valor from Israel, took the chance that Amaziah and his army were preoccupied in fighting against Edom, to raid some of the cities of Judah, killed three thousand in them, and took much spoils; counting it as a retribution for their lost honor, and their material loss by not taking spoil from the Edomites. God allowed for that to happen as a kind of chastisement against the inhabitants of the regions close to Israel, for being seduced by Israel, they worshipped the idols.. That is how the devil does; he seduces by evil desires; to corrupt and to lead to perdition.

4- AMAZIAH WORSHIPS THE IDOLS OF THE EDMITES:

Having started his reign as a good king, he ended up worshipping the idols of the people he conquered (14-16).

“Now it was so, after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up to be his gods, and bowed down before them, and burned incense to them” (14)

The gods of the people of Seir”; It came in the ‘Tergom’ as “the idols of the children of Gebal”.

After God granted Amaziah conquest over the Edomites; he viciously killed them; and as his heart was not loyal to God, he was drawn by their idols and abominations, to carry the idols, not to destroy them, but to worship them. Carrying the gods of Edom was a sign that he utterly destroyed them; for the gods are the last to deliver to the victorious, to carry them home, as a custom followed in the East in the old, and practiced by the Romans, to worship them, particularly if the victorious nation was familiar with those gods and look at them in some kind of reverence.

How foolish is he who runs after the evil desire! ... Although Amaziah saw in the gods of Seir nothing but weakness, death, and reproach? Snd although he saw by his own eyes what happened to those who worshipped them; yet, for the sake of temporary vain pleasures, he honored and worshipped them. He probably assumed that by worshipping them, those gods will forsake the Edomites.

It was befitting of him, instead of casting the captives down from the top of the rock, to cast those idols down to dash them to pieces. It is not logic for man to worship the false gods of the enemies whom he conquered; but his wild

treatment of the captives, has delivered him to further foolishness and lack of wisdom.

Therefore the anger of God was aroused against Amaziah, and he sent him a prophet who said to him, 'Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?'" (15)

The anger of God was not according to human concept, but a call to His people to repent, to return to the Lord, and to forsake evil. He sent to him a prophet to bring him back to reason, to avoid perdition; who spoke gently to him.

"So it was, as he talked with him, that the king said to him, 'Have we made you the king's counsel? Cease! Why should you be killed?' Then the prophet ceased, and said, 'know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this, and have not heeded my counsel'" (16)

The king did not endure to hear the voice of the prophet; for his idol-worship revealed the cruelty of his heart, and the inability of his ears to listen to the voice of God on the tongue of his prophet. Having nothing to justify his foolish behavior, Amaziah, instead of entering into a reasonable debate with the prophet, he got agitated and rebuked him, counted him dared to set himself as the king's counsel, for which no one has appointed him; and threatened to kill him. He probably intended to remind him of what happened to Zechariah the priest on the hand of his father (24: 21).. Having no fear of his threats, the prophet warned the king against heading to the way of perdition for his disobedience of the Lord, and for not listening to the counsel of his prophet. Seeing how the king was stubborn in his attitude, and how enslaved he became to his evil desires and idol-worship, the prophet ceased, according to the Lord's

words to his prophet Hosea: *“Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone”* (Hosea 4: 17).

5- AMAZIAH CHALLENGES THE KING OF ISRAEL:

“Then Amaziah king of Judah took counsel and sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, ‘Come, let us face one another in battle’” (17)

This episode of Ahaziah entering into a battle against Israel came in 2 kings 14: 8-20. Here we notice that he did not seek the counsel of the Lord nor of his prophets; but sought it from those around him, who flattered him, who had no relationship with God, His word, or His men; and who gave him a counsel that satisfied his pride, haughtiness, and foolishness.

“And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, ‘The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, ‘Give your daughter to my son as wife’;

and a wild beast that was in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thistle” (18)

Amaziah’s request to *“face one another in battle”* was most probably a surprise to the king of Israel. He previously sought the help of Israel, and hired one hundred thousand mighty men of valor, for the price of one hundred talents of silver (6), then discharged and sent them back home in great reproach. And here they are raiding the cities of Judah, killing three thousand of its inhabitants, and taking more spoils than what they would have taken from the Edomites. Now he requests from the king of Israel to face one another in battle. While being as weak as the thistle crushed under the feet of a wild animal, How could he ask in marriage, the cedar of Lebanon in its beauty and majesty?!

“Indeed you say that you have defeated the Edomites, and your heart is lifted up to boast. Stay at home now; why should you meddle with trouble, that you should fall -- you and

Judah with you’?” (19)

“But Amaziah would not heed, for it came from God, that he might give them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought the gods of Edom” (20)

“So Joash king of Israel went out, and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced one another at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah” (21)

“And Judah was defeated by Israel, and every man fled to his tent” (22)

“Then Joash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, at Beth Shemesh; and he brought him to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of

Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the corner Gate – four hundred cubits” (23)

“And he took all the gold and silver, all the articles that were found in the house of God with Obed-Edom, the treasures of the king’s house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria” (24)

As it came in 1 Chronicles 26: 15, Obed Edom and his descendants were appointed to guard the divine treasures.

7- AMAZIAH’S SORROWFUL END:

“Amaziah the son of joash, king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel” (25)

“Now the rest of the acts of amaziah, from first to last, indeed are they not written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel?” (26)

As it came in the 'Tergom, the first things of Amaziah, were when he walked in the fear of God; while the last things were when he had forsaken the upright path before the Lord.

'After the time that Amaziah turned away from following the lord, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish and killed him there" (27)

Amaziah, according to the author, was assassinated, not directly after his apostasy, but fifteen years later (2 Chronicles 25: 16). God was longsuffering on him; but when the cup of his evil was full, the prophecy against him that came in (2 Chronicles 25: 16) was fulfilled.

Distancing himself from God, Amaziah distanced himself as well from the hearts of his people, who made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, to kill him; on account of his foolishness in worshipping the gods of Edom, and in entering into an unwarranted battle against Israel. It so seems that that conspiracy was not by one or two men, but by a great number of people.

After his defeat before Israel, He lost his popularity; Jerusalem lost its walls, and the divine and the royal treasures were robbed. When Jerusalem turned into an unfortified city, Amaziah fled to Lachish to take refuge; but there he was killed;

"Then they brought him on horses and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah" (28)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 25

A JOYFUL BEGINNING AND A REPROACHFUL END

+ Amaziah's life remains a serious example;
He started his life in uprightness, even in the sight of the Lord;
But his heart was not completely loyal;
Although he cared to encounter God, and to obey His commandments;
And when he executed those who murdered his father, he did not kill their children;

But committed himself to the divine commandment , that a person shall die for his own sin;

Yet the gates of his heart were wide open before sin to crawl gradually into it;

+ Intending to enter into a battle against Edom,
He cared to gather together choice warriors from all Judah and Benjamin;
But although he cared for his people,
He did not seek the council of the Lord;
He hired one hundred thousand mighty men of valor from Israel, perverted from the divine truth;

He did not perceive that the conquest is not by the mighty men of valor, but in the hand of God;

+ When God sent a prophet to him to warn him, he listened and obeyed;
And consequently God granted him conquest over Edom;
But, on his part, he dealt with the defeated Edomites with unbecomingly viciousness;

And, at the same time, he took their idols, not to destroy, but to worship, and to burn incense before them;

How miserable he was,; honoring the idols that were unable to save its own worshippers from his hand.

+ God allowed for his chastisement; And the mighty men of valor of Israel
raided many cities of Judah;

He came to be like thistles that are crushed under the feet of a wild
animal;

While the king of Israel came to be like the cedar, whom the king of Judah
could not dare to face.

+ With humiliation the king of Israel trapped him;
And in ridicule he sent him back to Jerusalem after breaking down its
walls;

And carrying away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the royal
house; and hostages.

+ Forsaking the Lord with persistence and stubbornness, the Lord forsook
him;

He lost his throne, the holy city, and the temple of the Lord;

He fled away, and took refuge in Lechish;

There he was killed; to lose both his life and his eternity;

What a sad ending before all, in this world, and in eternity.

_ Keep me O Lord, lest my heart would pervert
By Your Holy Spirit, grant it to be satisfied by You, and to find rest in You;
With every breath of my life;

Your grace brings me forth from glory to glory, and from power to power;

My soul exults together with the prophet Jeremiah, saying:

“The Lord’s compassions are new every morning” (Lamentations 3: 23)

“The Lord is my Portion, says my soul” (Lamentation 3: 24)

+ Let the end of my life be happier than its beginning;

; For You are the beginning and the end;

You are the Way; So let me not pervert to the right nor to the left;

For You are my joy, strength, glory, and eternal portion.



CHAPTER 26

UZZIAH (AZARIAH), KING OF JUDAH

The contents of this chapter came very concise in (2 Kings 14: 21-22; 15: 1-7).

Uzziah started his reign with an upright life in the sight of the Lord; together with care for construction and conquests. But by forcing himself on the priesthood work, he was struck with leprosy until the day of his death.

Uzziah reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem; the longest of any of the kings of Judah. In the last years of his reign, because of being committed to dwell in an isolated house because of his leprosy, his son Jotham had to be a partner in his reign. In spite of his long reign, Uzziah's history came in seven verses (2 kings 15: 1-7).

Yet the second book of the chronicles presents many details that were not included in the book of kings. And gave Uzziah the following five privileges:

- a- It referred to his behavior under the guidance of Zechariah the priest (5); the same way Joash was under the guidance of his spiritual father Jehoiada (24: 2).
- b- He showed here his military interest, and his daring works (6-9; 11-15); Excavations revealed many of the military camps mentioned here.
- c- He was zealous on the progress of agriculture and animal production (10).

- d- The book explained that being inflicted with leprosy (2 kings 15: 5), was a divine punishment for forcing himself haughtily upon the priesthood work (16-21); the way king Saul did (I Samuel 13: 8-14).
- e- The book referred to that the rest of Uzziah's works were recorded by the prophet Isaiah (22).

In the same year Uzziah died, the prophet Isaiah saw the true King, the King of kings, sitting on the throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple (Isaiah 6: 1).

1- Uzziah walks uprightly in the sight of the lord	1 - 5
2- Uzziah's conquests in wars	6 - 8
3- Uzziah's constructions	9 - 10
4- Uzziah's work toward good organization	11 - 15
5- Haughtily, Uzziah forces himself upon the work of priesthood	16 - 18
6- Uzziah struck by leprosy	19 - 20
7- Uzziah's isolation until his death	21- 23

1- UZZIAH WALKS UPRIGHTLY IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD:

“Now all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah” (1)

“He built Elath and restored it to Judah after the king rested with his fathers” (2)

Uzziah built 'Elath', a city near 'Ezion Geber' on the eastern arm of the Red Sea; taken by David (2 Samuel 8: 20); was once bound to Solomon (8: 17); before it fell in the hands of Edom

"Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jacholiah of Jerusalem" (3)

"And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done" (4)

The grace of God presented a new king, and provided him with all the possibilities to grow and to prosper, yet without committing him to walk uprightly against his own free will; the way it did with Joash, and with Amaziah. The former, after the death of Jehoiada, followed the counsel of the idol-loving leaders; and the later, after God granted him conquest over the Edomites, worshipped their idols. Now, behold, the grace of God works in Uzziah to start with uprightness; yet, by the pride of his heart, he forced himself upon the priesthood work, by burning incense in the house of the Lord.

"According to all that his father Amaziah had done"; Here, the author mentions Amaziah for the sake of his good works; and not of his fallings.

"He sought God in the days of Zachariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper" (5)

He was in good relationship with Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of the Lord.; who, according to some, was the son of Zechariah, the priest stoned by Uzziah's grandfather Joash (24: 21). This Zechariah seemed to be a deep savant in prophecy, and provably a seeker of heavenly things, and according to the Septuagint version, had strong influence on Uzziah as a teacher

and an interpreter of prophecies. ... Not all prophets are necessarily said to possess this gift; namely to be seers; and not all of them were able to interpret the visions of God; but it is rather a gift given only to some like Joseph and Daniel.(Daniel 1: 7). Uzziah did not stop at rebuilding what the enemy destroyed, but sought from God to make him and his flock secure from the outside, as well as the inside enemies.

Attaching himself to Zechariah the priest, and seeking his counsel; *“As long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper”* (5). The attachment to God grants the believer a prosperous life, not only in his worship, but in all aspects of his life. Prosperity is a grant from God. .

“Now he went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath, the wall of Jabnah, and the wall of Ashdod and among the Philistines” (6)

Some of the Philistines brought gifts to Jehoshaphat (17: 11); and some came up against Jehoram his son (21: 16). When he attached himself to the Lord, He granted him conquest over the pagan Philistines; he broke down their strongholds; and built cities of his own in their land.

“God helped him against the Philistines, against the Arabians who lived in the Valley of Gur Baal, and against the Meunites” (7)

The Word of God helped him against the Philistines and the Arabians who lived in Gerar and in the Valley of Meun. According to the ‘Tergom’, by the Arabians he means those who were called ‘Meunrons’, ‘Munites, or ‘Meonites’.

“Also the Ammonites brought tribute to Uzziah. His fame spread as far as the entrance of Egypt, for he strengthened himself exceedingly” (8)

1- UZZIAH'S CONSTRUCTIONS:

“And Uzziag built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, at the valley Gate, and at the Corner Buttress of the wall; then he fortified them”
(9)

Uzziah was not one to waste his energies in wars against nations at the expense of the edification of his country and people.

“And he built towers in the desert. He dug many wells, for he had made livestock, both in the lowlands and in the plains; he also had farmers and vinedressers in the mountains and in the Carmel, for he loved the soil” (10)

He built towers to watch the movements of the enemies and to protect the livestock against them. Beside his care for the livestock, he also loved agriculture; something that brought great pleasure to the farmers, to see a king from the house of David so does. His care for agriculture gave him healthy relaxation between battles and wars and kept him from leading a life of leisure and pleasure, the way those who were famed for victories in wars usually did..

By the **desert, the coast, and the valley**, he meant:

By the desert, he means the region east and south-east, extending between the western coast of the Dead Sea up to near Beersheba.

By the coast, he means the valley close to the sea in the west between the valleys of Judiah and the Sea.

By the Valley, he means the very fertile land beyond the River Jordan in the Valleys of Gilead.

The Carmel: According to 'Calmet', there is one Carmel within Judah where 'Napal' used to live (see 1 Samuel 25); and there is another Carmel on the sea coast close to 'Kishon'. Both of them have very fertile soil fit for Vineyards.

He cared to dig many wells, like the fathers Patriarchs; which refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, the living water.

Commenting on the many wells dug by Abraham, then filled with earth by the Philistines; and after his death; and were re-dug by Isaac (Genesis 26: 18), the scholar Origen says: [What the pagan Philistines did refer to the work of the devil , corrupting the image in the human soul; and what Isaac did was a symbol of the work of the Lord Christ, restoring the divine image by His Holy Spirit.

As to digging the wells; it would be realized through a diligent study of the Holy Book. Hence Origen counsels us to pray; on account of that it often happens that we may be close to wells of running water – the Divine Scripture – yet we are unable to recognize on our own.

- + The way Isaac came to dig again the wells dug by his father; Only the Lord Christ (and His symbol Isaac), can remove from the wells of our souls the filth caused by our sins; to let the sweet water run again. He confirms the perpetuity of the divine image in man despite his sins, through the grace of Christ; through the transformation from one condition to another. And the same thing could be said concerning the perpetuity of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

- + Hence, the wells dug by Abraham, namely the books of the Old Testament, have been filled with earth by the Philistines, namely by the wicked teachers – the scribes and the Pharisees, or by the adversaries ... to deny those who follow Abraham quenching their thirst from the Holy Books, and to let them suffer thirst for the word of God; until Isaac comes, and his servants re-dig the wells to give them to drink.

We give thanks to Christ, the Son of Abraham, for the words written: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ" (Matthew 1: 1); He who came and opened the wells to us; and to those who said, "*Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?*" (Luke 24: 32)

- + We should know that, sometimes, we are reclining close to a well of "living water", namely, the divine books; we may read in them, but we cannot grasp the spiritual meaning in them. Hence there is a necessity of continuous weeping and praying, by which the Lord may open our eyes; For even the eyes of the blind men near Jericho, would never be opened unless they demand it from the Lord (Matthew 30: 20).

Should I say that our eyes are opened; for the Lord Christ has come to open up the eyes of the blind? Yes our eyes are opened ; and the literality of the law was taken away. But I fear that they will again be closed, and we shall fall into a deep sleep; that we do not see the spiritual meaning.

- + Be diligent in reading the Holy Bible; Yes be diligent; Knock, and the door-keeper will open it up to you; Do not stop at knocking; for prayer is the most important thing to reach the truth.
That is why, our Savior did not stop at saying: *Knock and it shall be opened*"; and *Seek, and you will find*"; but also said: *Ask, and it will be given to you*" (Luke 7: 7) . Everyone of us who minister to the Word of God, digs wells, seeking the living water by which the listeners are renewed.

- + The Jews are still dwelling at 'Marah', at the bitter waters; for the Lord has not provided them with the tree that makes the water sweet.
- + By casting a tree in the bitter water the Lord made it sweet. Once the tree (the cross) of Jesus comes to me, and the teaching of our Savior dwells in me, then the law of Moses becomes sweet for him who reads it with understanding.

(The scholar Origen)

2- UZZIAH'S WORK TOWARD GOOD ORGANIZATION:

"Moreover Uzziah had an army of fighting men who went out to war by companies, according to the number on their roll as prepared by Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the officer, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the king's captains" (11)

Uzziah cared as well for his army, and for his weapons of defense. It so seems that Uzziah during his days he walked uprightly in the sight of the Lord, was characterized by good organization and sound judgment. He divided the army into two divisions: the fighting men who went out to war by companies, to restore what the kingdom has lost to enemies; and another division who were ready to protect the strongholds and the land against any attack from outside (12-13).. It so seems that his system so better than that of anyone preceding him, that it was referred to by Jeiel the scribe, who was responsible for recording the names of the individual soldiers according to their companies.

"The total number of chief officers of the mighty men of valor was two thousand six hundred" (12)

“And under their hand was an army of three hundred and seven thousand five hundred, and made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy” (13)

“Then Uzziah prepared for them, for the entire army, shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows, and slings to cast stones” (14)

“And he made devices in Jerusalem, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and corners to shoot arrows and large stones. So his fame spread far and wide,

for he was marvelously helped till he became strong” (15)

The devices invented by skillful men to be on the towers and corners to shoot arrows and large stones, and not explosives; were already there before the time of Uzziah,, but it was developed to cast a larger quantity of stones, and to a greater distances. And according to the ‘Tergom’ he made hollow towers fixed to protruding parts of the walls, to help casting arrows and stones.. Those devices were so progressive concerning their time, that the Kingdom of Judah has gone ahead of the Greeks and the Romans in their use. No wonder that all that gave Uzziah an international fame, and made him the source of terror to his enemies.

3- UZZIAH HAUGHTILY FORCES HIMSELF UPON THE PRIESTHOOD WORK:

“But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense” (16)

According to the ‘Tergom’, Uzziah sinned against the Word of the Lord his God.. His prosperity and fame on an international level, and the terror of his enemy from him, made him haughty; and caused him to rebel against the divine law. Unfortunately, despite all his great prosperity, *“his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord his God, by entering the temple*

of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense” (16); the golden altar of the priests alone (Numbers 16: 40). The king was struck with leprosy for despising the holiness of God; and he was thrust out of the place; he indeed also hurried to get out of the presence of the Lord.

Some of the kings, the descendants of David, fell into idol-worship, in marrying pagan women, or even in murder; yet Uzzia, although not accused of any of those sins; yet he betrayed the Lord by forcing himself upon the priesthood work. In that he did not learn from what Saul of Benjamin, the first king of Israel did

We never heard that any king, whether good or wicked has so done; so why did king Uzziah dare to enter into the temple to burn incense on the altar, despite his knowledge that the law does not allow him to do this. When the high priest went after him, and with him eighty priests of the Lord, who were valiant men, he became furious and was angry with them.:

- a- Probably assuming that he is more zealous, and loved the worship more than the kings before him, he crossed the red line by practicing what he should not do,
- b- Probably assuming that the priests have not performed their duties with piety and godliness as they should, he thought that he could do better.
- c- Probably during a holy Feast, or an anniversary concerning him or his family, he entered to burn incense of thanksgiving to God to seek His mercy; but unfortunately with the spirit of haughtiness and challenge to the divine commandment.
- d- Taking into consideration that the kings who perverted to idol-worship, have, by themselves, burned incense to the idols; that his own father burned incense to the gods of Edom (25: 14); and so did Jeroboam (1 kings 13: 1); he probably intended to confirm that he is attached to the altar of the Lord, and not to those of the idols.

- e- Even though he got knowledge of the divine secrets and the interpretation of the prophecies, through his discipleship to Zechariah who had understanding of the visions of God, he did not walk as is befitting of that knowledge; but probably assumed that he was more knowledgeable than everyone else, and fell into pride and haughtiness.

But all that do not justify what he did. Having not been satisfied with the honors, the gifts, and the conquests granted to him by God, he intended to take the forbidden things by force, the way our early parents – Adam and Eve did.

+ Through four signs, we may be able to recognize every kind of pride of the proud and the haughty:

-- When they assume that they acquire any good feature on their own; about whom the apostle says: *“What do you have that you did not receive? Now, if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not*

received it?

-- If they believe that it is granted to them from high above, but for the sake of their own worthiness, against which the apostle warns us, saying:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”

(Ephesians 2: 8-9). And about himself, the apostle says: *“Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief”* (1 Timothy 1: 13).

By so saying, the apostle obviously proclaims that the grace is not granted to the worthy; when he teaches us two things: ‘that he had no

worthiness on his past evil deeds? And that what he has got was through the compassion of God.

-- If they boast having something they do not have; according to the divine voice by the prophet about Moab, saying: "*I know his wrath, says the Lord, but it is not right. His lies have made nothing right*" (Jeremiah 48:

30). And to the angel of the church of the Laodicean church, it is said: "*Because you say: I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked*" (Revelation 3: 17)

-- If they despise others, and intend to show off that they have what others do not have. By so doing, the Pharisee came out of the temple not justified, for considering himself unique, and worthy of good works; and put

himself above the supplicating tax-collector..

The saintly apostles warn us against this sin of pride; For it so happened that, returning from their preaching, and haughtily said: "*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name*" (Luke 10: 17) To keep them from rejoicing in such unique gift of performing miracles, the Lord Christ instantly said to them: "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*" (Luke 10: 18).

(Pope Gregory the Great)

- + Oh, how the love of authority, and the desire for the vain glory, destroys everything; how they make men stand against their salvation and the salvation of others; how they make them blind indeed, and in need of someone to take their hand in such darkness!

- + How could we get rid of that vain glory? Just think about those who spent enormous wealth for the sake of acquiring glory; and ended up having nothing! ... Think about the dead; What glory have they got?...Think how this glory does not exist, and will end up as nothing; Think that it carries nothing but the name, and nothing else!

Let us then flee from this pit; Let us seek only one thing: the glory from God, to be acceptable by Him, and commended by the Lord of us all. ... For, passing through our life in virtue, we shall certainly get the blessings promised to those who love Him, by the grace and mercy of Christ Jesus, to whom is the glory, the might, and the honor, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever, and to the end of time.

- + Let us flee from pride; for it is the most deceptive evil to the soul;; for from it will come evil desire, love of money, hatred, wars, and disputes. For those who wish to have more than what they already have, will never cease; for their desires emerge from their love of the vain glory ... If we manage to cut off pride, the head of every evil, we can, as well, bring to death all the other sources of evil; and nothing will keep us from living on the earth as though in heaven.

If we wish to acquire glory, we are committed to flee from the glory of the world, and desire glory from God alone; for then, we would have both, namely the glory from God, and the glory of the world.; and we would enjoy them through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his compassionate love.

- + Obviously, the exaggerated pride has been of the features of the false apostles.
- + The way pride is the fountain of all evil; humility is the foundation of every self-control.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“So Azariah the priest went after him, and with him was eighty priests of the Lord, who were valiant men” (17)

This action by the priests could have cost them their life

“And they withstood king Uzziah, and said to him, ‘It is not for you, Uzziah to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the Lord God” (18)

Having attempted to burn incense on the golden altar of incense, he was confronted by the high priest and with him eighty priests ; who were ready to burn incense to his account, according to the statute of their task. They clearly showed him that by his attempt he is breaking the law, and might be in danger.

“It is not for you, Uzziah to burn incense to the Lord”: For, according to the law, no one is allowed to do that except the priests, the sons of Aaron (Exodus 30: 7; Deuteronomy 33: 10; 1 Chronicles 23: 13). . David, Solomon, and Jehoshaphat have prayed together with the priests, blessed the people and preached them; but they never dared to burn incense; for the king has his own role, so has the priest; nobody is allowed to practice both roles: the priesthood and royalty. The kings are from the tribe of Judah, and the priests are from the tribe of Levi. Except the Savior Messiah who is the heavenly High Priest; and, at the same time, He is the King of kings.

They sought from him to honor the Lord, not through practicing what he should not; but through his commitment by the spirit of faithfulness together with love and humility with what he is granted by God.

“You shall have no honor from the Lord Your God”; In a meek and gentle way, they warned him, that disgrace will dwell on him before the people, beside the perdition of his soul, that he will lose even his honor as a king.

They reminded him of what happened to the strangers who forced themselves on the task of priesthood in the past (Numbers 3: 10; 28: 6); like Korah and his company who, although were Levites, but were not priests the sons of Aaron, rebelled against the prophet Moses, burned incense to God, and consequently perished (Numbers 16: 35).

It is befitting of us as believers in fellowship with the Lord Christ, priests and congregation, to look up to the heavenly High Priest, who, alone, can carry us to the bosom of His father.

4- UZZIAH STRUCK WITH LEPROSY:

“Then Uzziah became furious, and he had a censor in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the incense altar 19)

Becoming furious on the priests who rebuked him, and persisting on going his way, Uzziah considered their counsel as an interference in his own affairs; an aggression against his prestige; and an entrance into animosity with him. Yet, according to some, he was still better than his father, for he did not fall into idol-worship, even during his fall into pride, and forcing himself upon the task of priesthood.

“Leprosy”, in modern medicine is a serious dermatological disease, that, in its ultimate stages can lead to the deterioration of some body extremities, and a distortion of the features of man; that is beside its danger of being highly contagious. ... Yet what came in the Old Testament under the name “leprosy”,

might not refer to a particular disease; but to anything that might cause contagion, not just between men, but even between garments and the wood of furniture, etc.

Committing the leper, according to the Mosaic statutes, to be isolated from the congregation, and counting him unclean until he is cured, may be considered by some as a kind of cruelty; yet, even in the modern societies, despite the great progress of medicine in this century; we find that those inflicted by serious contagious dermatological diseases, are isolated in certain hospitals away from the cities; and even physicians are very cautious not to get infected by the disease from their patients.

Being bound in the mind of the Jews to sin, because of the distortion it might bring to the extremities of man, and the ease by which it can go from one to another, the Lord used it sometimes for chastisement; like He did to Miriam, the sister of the prophet Moses, because of her talk against her brother (Numbers 12: 10); and what happened to Gehazi Elisha's servant, when he ran after Naaman the Syrian, seeking silver and gold, and **lying** to his master Elisha the prophet (2 Kings 5: 27); and what happened to king Uzziah when he forced himself on the task of priesthood (2 Chronicles 26: 16-21).

“And Azariah the priest and all the priests looked at him, and there on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him” (20)

Having furiously confronted the priests, and challenged the divine commandment, leprosy started to appear on his forehead; so that the disease would reveal the fruit of his disobedience of the commandment; and that he is committed to get out of the place in a hurry, lest he might be inflicted by some more serious punishment.

According to the historian Josephus, when Uzziah threatened to kill the priests who opposed him, an earthquake happened, the roof of the temple split open, and the sun rays fell upon the face of the king to reveal the dwelling of leprosy on his forehead. According to some it is the earthquake that was mentioned in (Amos 1: 1; Zechariah 14: 5). That public strike, testified by the sun, and by the wrath of the earth, put an end to the controversy between the king and the priests, who were encouraged to thrust him out of the temple; and indeed he also hurried to get out, because of the disgrace that dwelt upon him; when he perceived that that new development will, not only keep him from burning incense on the altar of God, but even from having normal relationship with men. Being not convinced by the words of the priests, he was indeed convinced by the language of the disease that deprived him of his honor, beside his ability to approach even those beloved by him. Attempting to take the honor of priesthood by force, beside his royal honor, he was bared of every honor, even among his subjects.

By that God gave an example of what would dwell upon the proud; revealed His jealousy on the purity of His house; and sought from every man, however good or great, to be committed to the divine commandment. ... According to some, God allowed for the king who had no fear of Him, to be struck with leprosy to be isolated from the society, and to forsake his royal duties, to let him have time to think about his relationship with God. They think that, although he was a good king, yet he sinned by forcing himself upon the task of priesthood; a black point in his life.. ... that he probably assumed that he would become closer to God through burning incense on the altar of incense, that should not be approached except by priests; ... and that, in his isolation, he might probably return to reason, perceive his fault, and remorse..

+ Whoever is not assigned to this task, and practices it on his own, will fall under the same punishment of Uzziah.

5- UZZIAH'S ISOLATION UNTIL HIS DEATH:

“King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord. Then Jotham his son was over the king’s house, judging the people of the land” (21)

Being a leper, Uzziah had to be isolated from the whole society, from the military, civil, and religious leaders, and even from his own family members. Losing, therefore, the possibility of acting as a king, he had to let his son Jotham be over the king’s house. Judging the people of the land.

He assumed to be above every law and every authority; but being a leper he became subject to the observation and judgment by the priests (Deuteronomy 24: 8).

He forced his way into the sanctuary, where only the Levites and the priest are allowed to enter. Now he is not allowed to enter even into the outer court.

He became like Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, who was struck by leprosy (Numbers 7: 14).

“Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos wrote” (22)

This work has been completely lost; as from Isaiah about Uzziah, we have only what is included in (Isaiah 1: 1; 6: 1).

In the year of Uzziah’s death, Isaiah saw his vision (Isaiah 6), to proclaim that the true king is the Lord of hosts; and that God’s grace is set upon the sacrifice (Isaiah 6: 7)

“So Uzziah rested with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of burial which belonged to the kings, for they said, ‘He is a leper’. Then Jotham his son reigned in his place” (23)

He was not buried in the tomb of the kings, on account of that his corpse carried the signs of leprosy, counted as uncleanness.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 26

GRANT ME THE SPIRIT OF HUMILITY TO BE LIKE YOU, O KING OF KINGS

- + Through the spirit of humility, king Joash submitted to Jehoiada;
And lived with an upright heart, working for the glory of Your holy name;
Here, his grandson Uzziah become a disciple under Zechariah the priest
and prophet;
He sought You, and You became the secret of his prosperity.

- + God granted him conquest over the pagan Philistines;
He broke down the walls of some of their cities; and built cities for himself
on their land;
He became strong, and his fame reached many nations;
He cared for military development and used new weapons;
He became the terror to his enemies
Fearing the Lord, He let him be feared and honored;
He organized and strengthened his army.

- + Then, it so happened that that prosperous mighty man plunged into the pit
of pride;
Assuming that he is greater than all, he became the captive of ego;

Clothed in the garment of the devil, he haughtily forced his way into what is beyond his authority;

He followed the lead of the pagan kings around him who carried out the task of priesthood to idols;

Haughtily, he intended to burn incense in the temple of the Lord, disregarding the law;

And when the high priest and the priests warned him, he became furious;
He counted their warning an insult against his prestige as a king;
He forced his way to the sanctuary, and held the censor to burn incense;
From the censor the abhorrent smell of his disobedience and the corruption of his heart rose up;

instead of offering incense to gain the mercies of God;
Chastisement dwelt upon him from the Dweller in heaven;
He was struck by leprosy on his forehead, that he could not hide;
All feared to touch him lest they would get the disease;
He had to hurry up and leave because of his public disgrace
He lost fellowship with his own family, approach to the congregation, and talks with the military and civil leaders;

His debate with the priests was cut off, and he was isolated in the house of sickness;

Instead of combining both the royal and the priesthood authorities;
He lost what he had, and got nothing;
No way for us to acquire the blessings, like love and humility;
No way for us to reach prosperity and honor, other than the obedience to God;

Uzziah forced his way to the sanctuary;
To get chased out of his own royal palace;
Even in his death he was not buried in the tomb of the kings, but in the field of burial.

+ Grant me, O Lord, to attach myself to You, and to imitate Your meekness;

Grant me, by Your Holy Spirit to become Your fellow in humility;
You, Creator of heaven and earth were buried among the dead;
In order to enjoy the power of Your resurrection;
Let me be risen with You, and enjoy the deposit of Your heavens;
Through pride, man would lose Your image in him;
By Your grace, You grant me humility; that Your image transfigures in me
day by day;
I anticipate the day of Your coming on the clouds, together with Your
angels;
Your grace raise me, and lifts me up to You, to hide in Your bosoms.

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AN ANNEX TO 2 CHRONICLES 26

UZZIAH THE KING AND ISAIAH THE PROPHET

BY: ST. (MAR) JACOB EL-SEROUGI

As the prophet Isaiah performed his prophetic work in the days of Uzzia, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Isaiah 1: 1), here, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, in his (poem) # 162, binds Uzziah's behavior to the mission of the prophet Isaiah. He started his (poem) by a long introduction on the Holy Trinity; for, "*in his vision in the year that Uzziah's died, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphimone cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts' ...*" (Isaiah 6: 3). He also concentrated on the prophecies of Isaiah about the Lord Christ, and St Mary, and talked about the rejection of the daughter of Abraham (the Jews) of the secret of the Holy Trinity; and her worship of idols.

Then he talked about king Uzziah forcing himself upon priesthood.

As he always did in his poems on the texts of the Holy Book, (Mar) Jacob was unique in his interpretation of what happened to king Uzziah.

The daughter of Abraham (Israel) corrupted her kings:

According to (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, the behavior of king Uzziah, who started his reign well by doing what is right in the sight of the Lord, according to all what his father Amaziah did (2 Chronicles 26: 4); he did not force himself upon the task of priesthood in pride and haughtiness, all of a sudden, but that was the fruit of responding to the people, who, even in their submission to the reforming good kings, their hearts, sometimes, flared with idol-worship and its abominations. He explained that in the following ways:

- 1- As the people set forth from the land of Egypt, when the prophet Moses ascended Mount Horeb, and was late coming back, the people committed Aaron to make a golden calf for them to worship and to dance around it
- 2- The people often imitated the corrupt ways and the abominations of the surrounding nations in celebrating their feasts and seasons.
- 3- The people often applied pressure on their kings to practice the pagan customs in a public way.
- 4- According to (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, the perversion of Solomon through his marriage to many women and having many concubines, was most probably motivated by the leaders around him; or as a response to the perverted people in some way or another.
- 5- As examples of the kings who perverted, even for a limited time, to idol-worship, (Mar) Jacob mentioned Rehoboam son of Solomon; Jeroboam who dissented from the house of David, and gathered

around him ten tribes of Israel; Ahab who married the evil Isabel, and others.

According to (Mar) Jacob, therefore, the people had their role in a way or another. Yet that does not relieve the kings of their responsibility on their own evil ways, for in their perversion they provoked their people more and more toward idol-worship. That clearly shows how both the king and the people may provoke one another, either toward corruption or exhort them toward godliness.

+ Abraham's daughter loved the golden calf (Exodus 32: 4); and taught her kings to worship idols;

Since her childhood, she loved the calf, made idols, and dedicated seasons for vanities;

Her kings followed her lead in hating the Lord; and her judges despised Him by their evil behavior;

She taught iniquity to her kings, and provoked them to drink the cup of idol-worship;

Knowing how much she loves vanities, her kings made more idols to please her;

David, the divine and Just king went to sleep; and was replaced by Solomon who was raised among evil women;

Abraham's daughter set traps for him through many women; and taught him how to offer sacrifices to the gods (1 kings 11: 4)

She raised Rehoboam to become an idol-worshipper (1 kings 14: 23); for she longed to have more idols in every possible way;

Jeroboam consummated her evil desire by making calves (1 kings 12: 28-29); And Ahab and Isabel pleased her by their idols (1 kings 16: 23)

One gave her comfort by making a four-faced idol; and the other by passing his own son in the fire, for he became an idol-worshipper (2 Chronicles 33: 6-7).

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

King Uzziah forces himself upon the work of priesthood:

After talking about Uzziah who started his reign in an upright way, then perverted toward idol-worship and its abominations; helped by those around him, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi said that, seeing how the kings of the surrounding nations enjoyed both the royal and the priesthood authorities, Uzziah counted himself in an awkward position among the kings of the earth.

Then he dared to force himself upon priesthood; and when the high priest with the priests rebuked him, he did not care, but he insulted them. (Mar) Jacob portrayed him as daring to snatch the sensor out of a priest's hand , and to enter into the sanctuary to burn incense on the altar of incense before God.

+ Uzziah, who managed to preserve himself from idol-worship. Abraham's daughter made him dare to force himself upon priesthood

The cause of the inspiration that came to Isaiah, is here for whoever listens with discernment;

Uzzia, by his pride of heart dared to burn incense before God;

Because of his conquest in war, he dared to burn incense in the place of the priest;

Disregarding the priest who taught him, he dared with iniquity to force himself upon priesthood;

Because the crown granted to him by God seemed little in his eyes; he entered to snatch the censor from the hand of a priest;

Nor satisfied with royalty, he intended to force himself upon priesthood;

In pride he insulted the priesthood, and in iniquity he snatched the censor from the hand of a priest;

He was puffed up by the pride of leadership, he did not understand that he is not allowed to burn incense before God.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-serougi)

Two integrated authorities: The priesthood on the spirits, and the royalty on the bodies:

St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi presents to us a living portrait of the relationship between the temporal authority of the State, and its men, and the active role of the church and its leaders. No contradiction nor dispute should be between the state and the church; for the security of one is an edification of both. To the head of the state, honor is given and authority is proclaimed; and they are also given to the church as far as its role is concerned.

The state has no right to commit the church to whatever contradict its faith and its active spiritual role; And the church has no right to meddle in politics.

+ God gave men two authorities: royalty and priesthood.

The king has authority on bodies, that listen to him. And the priest has authority on the spirits, that also listen to him.

The king has a material sword that only kills the body; And the priest has the sword of the Word, to put under curse and to cut off the soul.

The king has authority on possessions and on buildings; And the priest has authority on spirits to discipline them.

The king may give gold to whom he loves; And the priest can give the absolution to whoever demands it.

The king has a public crown and rule; And the priest has a secret word that solve problems.

The law gave the bow to the king, and the censor to the priest; for each of them to perform his role according to his authority

It is unbecoming of the priest to carry a sword, nor of the king to carry a censor.

The spiritual things are for the priest; and the carnal things are for the king

The priest has no authority to deal with the public things; Nor the king to deal with the secret things.

The two authorities are given by God to control the world by priesthood and royalty.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The priest Azariah rebukes king Uzziah on what he did:

When King Uzziah went beyond his limits by burning incense in the temple of the Lord; he was rebuked by Azariah the priest, who demanded from him not to force himself upon the temple of the Lord, nor to practice something out of his authority.

+ King Uzziah went beyond his limits; by daring to take the place of the priest;

He thought that he could have both the bow and the censor; and assumed that he could have both the royalty and the priesthood;

He already has got what concern the kings; and yet he sought what concern the priests;

With pride he entered the sanctuary; and in iniquity he snatched the censor;

Intending to burn incense before the Lord; the priest moved to rebuke him,

The Levite priest started to rebuke him without fear, and with a loud voice;

The holy temple is within the authority of the priest;... You should know, O king that this rank is not for you;

You have authority outside on the state; but the authority in the house of forgiveness is not yours;

You are only a king and not a priest. The censor is not for you by God;

You may command outer wars; but the inner sacrifices are for me to offer;

I have no bow; and you have no incense from God; ... Take what is yours, and leave what is not;

It is enough for you to have the crown and rule over the people, ...

Therefore, do not snatch another rank which is not yours;

You are a king with no authority over priesthood; ... Therefore stay where you belong, and do not desire what is not yours;

Take your sword and get out; be strong on the land; and leave the censor to me to offer incense in the house of the Lord.

By the Most High, you are given the kingdom; and I am given priesthood. ... Therefore, O king, why do you seek the priesthood?

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

Uzziah;s anger against Azariah the priest:

The heart of Azariah the priest was not preoccupied with how the king robbed him of his authority; as much as that he broke the law of God by forcing himself upon the work concerning the tribe of Levi;

Daringly, the king snatched the censor, and entered the sanctuary to burn incense, imitating the kings of the pagan nations. Hence the priest hastened to warn him lest he, himself, would be condemned by God on his slothfulness with the king. The king felt that the priest insulted and despised him before his royal entourage and the priests. He started to think how to pay him back.

+ The priest talked with the purity of heart against the king; lest, if he kept silent, he, himself, would be blamed by God;

The priest did not protest that the king snatched his rank; as much as for his daring and violence;

The priest was offended; for the system was disturbed; and his children the Levites were offended by the daring of the king;

Although he was not a Levite, Uzziah snatched the censor to enter and burn incense; by which he trampled upon, and annulled the law of the house of God;

Being despised the priest because of the iniquity he committed; the king was consequently despised by his own men;

The priest shot him with the words of truth, as though by arrows; And the anger of the king rose like smoke;

Getting offended and angry, he became the laughingstock before his entourage; he started to threaten the priest of what he intends to do with him;

Before the anger of the king, the priest stood firm rebuking him like a little kid who did wrong.

(St. (Mar Jacob El-Serougi)

Uzziah clothed with a shirt of leprosy:

Having put on the daring upon the divine sanctities; leprosy appeared on his forehead, as a garment that he would not be able to take off. Instead the incense of sweet fragrance, from the censor in the hand of the king, the smell of pride, arrogance and haughtiness came up; a smell not endured by the Lord of heaven. The king came to be as though has entered into a heavenly banquet with defiled attire, to be worthy of being cast out. Leprosy dwelt upon him as a sign of his commitment to get out instantly from the temple. The violent king came to be in reproach and disgrace; while the priest saw heaven moves to defend the sanctity

of the temple. According to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, the king, intending to snatch the attire of priesthood, ended up putting on that of the horrible leprosy.

+ The Lord revealed what is His in the house of forgiveness; He produced leprosy and defiled the king;

The hidden eye searched his censor, and saw that he, with pride, has put in it incense with pride;

When it saw how he despised the priest in the house of forgiveness, he was not allowed to burn incense to God;

Intending to trample upon the poor yet the splendid priest, he snatched his censor to bring it himself before God;

The king counted it an insult to stand behind the priest, so he counted the restoration of authority in the holy temple to the priests;

Through his pride he did not condescend to be forgiven by the incense raised by the priest for the sake of many;

Hence, out of his censor an abhorrent smell was raised up to Divinity, whose rage flared;

When he was defiled by the incense he raised, it clothed him with a defiled garment on his members;

The king was struck with leprosy, for desiring an authority that is not for him; while the priest bore the gladness of face before many;

From the holy house Uzziah was struck with leprosy, to keep him from snatching the attire of priesthood, and from burning the incense;

Leprosy came as a support to the priest to rebuke the king, who was disgraced for his foolishness;

He intended to put on the Ephod the attire of priesthood; but, instead put on that of the horrible leprosy.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The pure heart and thoughts are like holy incense raised before God:

The holy God smells the holiness of the heart, the mind, and the depths of the soul, as sweet fragrance;

Man may have a pure body, namely a clean one, yet the uncleanness of his heart pours defilement upon all the members of his body. God granted us the free will to present our longing for salvation, and love as sweet fragrance, to grant us forgiveness.

When King Uzziah entered into the temple with his free will, bearing the pride of heart; instead of offering a sweet incense he offered an abhorrent one; and came out clothed in leprosy over his forehead as a sign of the wrath of the Lord on him.

+ The pure heart is a burnt offering before God, He who loves the sweet fragrance of the pure thoughts;

The love (salvation) of the soul is a censor filled with life; and the love for the Lord is an incense raised before God;

The Lord sought from the children of Levi to bring their thoughts before Him together with their censors;

He purified the soul that carries the censor, to grant her the sweet fragrance of perfumes;

The fire of the censor is likened to the love of the Lord; and the spices to the movements of the mind;

Once the good thoughts are produced by the free will, they are readily received by the love of the Lord;

From the man beloved by the Lord, a sweet fragrance rises up to God; who brings forgiveness down on him;

Uzziah did not offer the sweet fragrance of the soul; but in iniquity he snatched the censor of the priest;

Justly, leprosy came down upon him from the holy house, as a horrible wage for the censor offered with hate;

While his body might be pure, his heart was defiled; hence the defilement of his soul spread upon all his body members;

Uzziah entered into the holy temple with the arrogance and the pride of royalty;

And came out with a bowed down crown, a lowly spirit, clothed with leprosy, and became a laughingstock of the nations;

All this happened on account of that he dared to force his way into the sanctuary, and burn incense before the Divinity.

Once he snatched the censor from the hand of the Levite priest, he was struck with leprosy, and was reproached before those present;

Having trespassed his limits, and in contradiction of his rank, he snatched the censor, he became a foreigner in the kingdom,

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The vision of Isaiah came in the year king Uzziah died (Isaiah 6: 1); and the words of the Lord to Hosea came in the days of Uzziah and Jotham (Hosea 1: 1). From these two texts, (Mar) Jacob deduced that, although Isaiah was a contemporary of the episode when Uzziah forced himself upon the priesthood, yet he kept silent, probably, as he said in his vision: *“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips”* (Isaiah 6: 5). By keeping silent, and not rebuking the king on what he did, Isaiah lost the spirit of prophecy for sometime; that came instead upon Hosea to rebuke the king. According to (Mar) Jacob, it was befitting of Isaiah to rebuke the king the way Azariah the priest did. The Lord allowed for Isaiah to pass through a period of silence as a chastisement all along the time Uzziah suffered from leprosy, and until the day of his death. And once Isaiah offered a true repentance, and came to be bitter in his soul because of what dwelt upon the people, he confessed that he is a man of unclean lips, and that the people

are as well. Having enjoyed that heavenly vision, and perceived the secret of the Only Begotten Son, he was terrified before the Holy One; and remembered that he did not rebuke king Uzziah on his arrogance, and his foolish attempt to force himself upon priesthood. The prophet Isaiah confessed his fault, and counted himself as a man having unclean lips, dwelling in the midst of people of unclean lips.

This is a personal interpretation that, I believe did not come in the sayings of the fathers; hence I did not quote any of his sayings in my commentary on this chapter. I shall only mention what Isaiah enjoyed by seeing the cherubim and listening to their praises to God.

The seraphim believe in the secret of the Holy Trinity, and taught it to the prophet Isaiah:

The highest privilege Isaiah has got was his recognition of the secret of the Holy Trinity; One God, triple in Persons. This knowledge is bound to the unique heavenly atmosphere of exultation and praise, in beautiful and fiery tunes.

+ The seraphim of fire uttered the poem of faith, and repeated it before Isaiah to learn it as well;

By the flute they praised the news of the awesome faith, made of fire;

The high creatures gave thanks to the Son together with His Father in beautiful and fiery tunes;

If the Holy Trinity was only One Person, it would be one and not three 'Trisagions' (Namely "Holy, Holy, Holy" ,as uttered;

But as long as the seraphim uttered three 'Trisagions', the world learned that God is three Persons;

The perfect Son is well known as equal to His father, as testified by the poem authored by the heavenly creatures;

It was said: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord; three 'Trisagions'..

In the Godhead, it was said “Lord” and not ‘Lord’; for the Lord is One, and the three Trisagions concern Him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The ‘Trisagion” (the three Holies) refer to the equality of the Persons in the Trinity:

The praise by the seraphim in chapter 6 of the book of Isaiah, came to reveal the secret of the Holy Trinity:

1- It would not be feasible to say the first ‘Holy’ for the Father, the second for the Son, and the third for the Holy Spirit, as though they are separate and isolated from one another.

2- None of the three ‘Holies’ differ from the other two; for none of the Persons is greater or smaller than the other two..

3-The three ‘Trisagions” reveal the existence of three Persons; yet the praise as a whole is directed to the three Persons, as it is to each One of them.

4-They did not say: ‘Holy, holy, holy, (are the **Lords**)’, but “*is the **Lord** of hosts*”; for it is One Lord, One God.

5-This praise is uttered by the seraphim long before the world and man are created.

+ The uttered, do not signify which ‘Holy’ is for the Father, which is for the son, and which is for the Holy Spirit

None of them has a specific ‘Holy’ but there are three ‘, not divided for the three of them;

There is no one of a higher level, one of a medium level, nor one of a lower level;;

It is not said that the first voice is that for the Father, the second is that for the Son;

In our mouths, voices are set in a row, one after the other; but in Godhead, there are no rows or divisions;

Three voices of 'Trisagions' for the three of them; for all the voices concern holiness;

Three voices to proclaim the Trinity: The Lord is One, because the Divinity is indivisible;

One is the Holy One; but because He is three Persons, three 'Trisagions' are secretly sent to Him by the angels

The fiery choir moved before Isaiah to say; "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord...", and not 'the Lords'"

Three 'Trisagions' because the Persons are three; yet the Lord is One, for the Lord is indivisible;

The voices are not divided into three divisions: one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Spirit;

For all the voices are of the Father; All are of the Son, and all are of the Holy Spirit, with no division; for the Godhead is One;

In the prophecy, and in the praise of the heavenly hosts, the One is three, and the three are One;

From the beginning, the Trinity was glorified by the living fiery movement of the creatures of light.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The Jews do not believe that the Father has a Son, whom He revealed to the children of His secret:

It was befitting of the Jews to believe in the Holy Trinity; having got many chances to recognize its secret through the prophecies within their hands.

If the seraphim as heavenly rank have recognized this secret through their nature being in heaven; they, in their turn became teachers about it to the Jews;

+ The Father, in every occasion proclaimed to have a Son, He revealed His secret to the children of His secret;

It was expected from the Jews not to separate the Son from His Father
Knowing the hidden secret, the fiery seraphim always moved by God to praise Him;

They moved by the Son Himself to utter their praise; for by Him they exist; and commanded to serve;

By their sense, He has granted to their nature, they learned to sing by the flute the three 'Trisagions';

For they have seen the Son in the bosom of His Father;
Knowing thrice that God is One, the high creatures praise Him with the flute, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of hosts"

The Jew did not recognize the great secret as uttered; for he chose to close his ears;

Nor he saw the portrait of the Son in the Holy Book, like light, for he chose to be blind;

Why did the seraphim utter the three 'Trisagions', except to teach the world about the presence of the Holy Trinity?

If the people who chose to be blind, used their eyes, they would have seen the portrait of the Son in the Holy Book.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The live coal of Isaiah symbolizes the secret of the body of the Son of God (Isaiah 6: 6-7):

If by the praise of the seraphim, the prophet Isaiah recognized the secret of the One God of three Persons; ... By the live coal that touched his lips he perceived the secret of the body of the Lord, the Giver of forgiveness. How great is the body of the Lord offered to the sinners to purify them. As it was not possible for the Seraph to hold the live coal, that symbolizes the Lord Christ, by his bare hand, he used a tong so as not to get burned.

Now, the priest of the new covenant was given, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, to give communion of the body and blood of the Lord Christ, to have the forgiveness of sins, and to enjoy the eternal life.

+ Here, the Seraph holding a live coal by a tong – the secret of the body of the Son of God -- approaches the prophet Isaiah;

He revealed to him the way it was going to happen on earth; how the mercies of God will shine to forgive all the sinners;

He said to him, "*Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged*" (Isaiah 6: 7)

To the pearl here put on the table, is likened the live coal that was given by the angel to Isaiah;

The angel, by his fiery hand, held the tong, and by it he took the live coal of the secret from the table;

By that, the prophet saw a portrait of all the things of the future; and how the iniquity of the world will be forgiven;

The seraph did not take it by his bare hand lest it would be burned; and the prophet did not take it by his mouth lest he would perish;

Those prophetic secrets minister every day in the house of forgiveness;

As the live coal physically appears, behold, it is eaten from the divine table;

Behold, the priest holds it by his fingers, and gives it to the sinner to eat and be purified;

Behold, it is eaten and drank through the bread and wine; and behold, all sinners distribute it by their hands;

The secret of the forgiving fire is revealed by the movement of the wing and by the splendor of the heavenly creatures;

And since that time, the prophet learned the secret of the church; and in his prophecy, he brought forth to the world the portrait of beauty.

(St.)Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

Nature and the Holy Book testify to the Son and the Holy Trinity:

St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi stands amazed before the abstention of the Jews to give heed to the prophecies within their hands. How, across the eras, they readily received the pagan worship, namely the worship of the idols of false gods and goddesses; while refraining to believe in the Son of God, testified to by their prophets.

+ Neither the prophets with their inspiration, nor the actual facts would convince the Jew;

Foolishly, he only knows how to slander, and to reject all the secrets of the Only begotten Son;

To him was proclaimed that God has a Son; Yet, because he turned pagan, he despised and trampled the prophecy;

He shut his ears and closed his eyes, so as not to hear nor see;

It is easier for him to say: There are gods and goddesses; than to believe that God has a Son.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

Evidences for the Son: The sun and its light; the tree and its fruits, and the soul and its word:

Nature itself testifies to the Son of God: The sun gives light, without which it would not be counted as a sun.; and the tree produces fruits which we enjoy; So why do they not believe in the birth of the Word of God from the Father?

+ He (the Jew) then, does not believe that the sun gives light; nor the flame has heat!

Nor the tree has fruits, or the soul has the Word hidden in it;

He refuses to believe the nature which he sees, nor the book which he reads;

Nor to believe Isaiah who has seen and talked about the glory of the only begotten Son;

He does not incline his ears to listen to the truth.

(St. (Mar) Jacob el-Serougi)

Isaiah preaches the Holy Trinity:

Having responded to God seeking whom to send, Isaiah preached the Holy Trinity; For the Father is proclaimed; the Son was preached, and it was the Holy Spirit who sent him;

+ The prophet came forth out to preach, and to reveal to the world the secret that was hidden;

He raised his voice to reveal the Son to the earthly creatures, and to preach His glories to the great congregation of the heavenlies;

He heard the amazing songs of the seraphim; and by their inspiration, he partook by his own voice of their praise;

He understood how they proclaimed the news thrice; and from their word, he recognized the whole Holy Trinity;

Becoming sure that the Trinity has Persons; he revealed to the earth the hidden secrets;

He described the 'Father', and named Him in his prophecy; He revealed and preached the 'Son', saying: "*We are given a Son*".

And intending to reveal the Person of the Holy Spirit, he said: The Lord and "His Spirit" sent me, and revealed the whole secret;

The name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with their Persons, is undoubtedly obvious in Isaiah's prophecy.

Blessed is the church that believes in the Holy Trinity:

+ Blessed are you, O church, the companion of the secrets of the prophecy; for your beauty is prevailed with the treasures of the apostles;

Behold, the Trinity is preached by the mouths of your sons; as it was previously revealed to Isaiah by the Seraphim;

You confessed the Father, You did not replace Him with vanities; You believed in the Son, and did not separate Him from His Father;

You believed in the Spirit, and did not make Him a stranger from the Essence; Your faith is supreme and pure by all voices;

Behold, the voices of the heavenlies, in you mix with the voices of the earthlies;

Behold, Isaiah rejoices in you by his prophecy; for you understood his inspirations as they were uttered;

Your hope is in the Father; your truth is in the Son; and your boasting is in the Holy Spirit. Blessed is He, with whose love He gave you His body to be saved by Him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

CHAPTER 27

JOTHAM, KING OF JUDAH

This chapter is considered the shortest in the two books of the chronicles. Although it included a commendation of the person of the godly king Jotham, yet the people acted corruptly in the house of the Lord. The book did not provide us with the cause why the king could not lead the people on the way of godliness.

As there was nothing much of the life of this king; the author was satisfied with what came in 2 kings 15: 32).

As the people acted corruptly in the days of Jotham, and fell under chastisement, despite the godliness of the king, there was urgent need to re-establish the worship in Judah.

1- Jotham did what is right in the sight of God	1 - 2
2- Jotham's constructions	3 - 4
3- Jotham's conquest over the Ammonites	5
4- The secret behind Jotham's strength and prosperity	6
5- The duration of Jotham's reign, and his death	7 – 9

1- JOTHAM DID WHAT IS RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD:

“Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerushah the daughter of Zadok” (1)

In 2 kings 15: 32-38, we find a concise narration of the reign of Jotham. We know that after being a partner of the reign of his father Uzziah for a period of nine years

(750-742 BC), he reigned alone from 742 to 735 BC. The sixteen years therefore combine the two periods.

“And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah had done,. But still the people acted corruptly” (2)

The Holy Book testifies that Jotham did what was right in the sight of God, according to all that his father Uzziah had done; that he did not fall into what his father did; did not force his way into the sanctuary, and did not force himself upon priesthood. He was very careful to avoid all the shortcomings of his father.

His support for that behavior was probably the knowledge provided by Zechariah the priest to his father, and the benefit he got from Micah who started his prophecy during his days (Micah 2: 7). Although his knowledge of the divine secrets were undoubtedly less than his father's, yet he turned knowledge into work by the divine grace.

knowledge is extremely necessary; yet it should not stop at the mind alone; for, although it is a great gift from God, yet without God it is vain. By the grace of God the mind is sanctified to perceive and to practice the commandments of God, without separation between the mind, the heart, and the life; for they are all intermingled with one another. The true knowledge is not absolutely theoretical, but steadfast in the heart, and in life.

Yet the point of weakness in Jotham's life was that he did not enjoy the spirit of leadership and shepherding, befitting of a godly king, and a believer. For whoever is attached to God, the Lover of mankind, would love everyone, and would seek the glory for all.

+ Some intend to confine love within the limits of the continent of Africa. But if you intend to love Christ, you should stretch your hand with love over the whole world; where the members of Christ are wide spread.

(St. Augustine)

+ As the true love is to love all; if someone hates even one man, he is committed to hasten to vomit that bitter morsel of hatred, to be worthy to receive the sweetness of love itself.

(Father Caesarius bishop of Arle)

+ Behold, it may be said that we love one another; but having one or several friends, is not love for the sake of God, but rather for the sake of those beloved.

Love for the sake of God does not have this as a foundation of love; but, as a man, he loves all mankind, he loves those who have his same faith, being true brethren; but should also love the heretics, the pagans, and the Jews, being brethren in nature; feel sorry for them, labor, and cry for their sake.

By this he would be doing according to the example of the Lord, not by performing amazing works, but when he loves all men, even his enemies.

We become amazed to see how God performs miracles, particularly when He reveals His love and longsuffering on man.

If this is worthy of admiration in God; how much more would it be in men (by their love for everyone).

(St. John Chrysostom)

Although the king did what was right in the sight of God, and was careful not to fall into what his father did; yet he was to be blamed, for not caring to reform the behavior of his people; being said: “*Still the people acted corruptly*” (2). He presented good teachings through being a role model; yet he did not act positively to reform his people’s ways; Or he probably was unable to work in an unfaithful nation; as we may see in the books of Isaiah and Micah.

When John the Baptist was asked: “*Who are you:*”; we would expect him to answer; saying: ‘I am whom Gabriel who stands before the throne of God, came to tell my father the good news of my birth’, or ‘I am the angel who prepares the way before the anticipated Messiah’; he did not say this or that, but said: “*I am the voice crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord*” (Luke 3: 4). A leader should: be able to teach; to proclaim loudly the voice of the Lord, to reveal the law of the Lord to the people of God; and to instruct them, how to live. God, Himself the Wisdom, and the Teacher of the universe, requires from the leaders to learn and to teach, so as not to perish, and lead the others to perdition. What discerns between the shepherd and the flock; is that the shepherd is able to teach the others the way of the Lord

Although Jotham had no fellowship with the high places; yet he did not remove them, and “*the people still acted corruptly*”. Hence the prophet Micah talked about the judgment concerning the people and their leaders, without mentioning the king who did not partake of their evil. Micah talked about the judgment concerning the sins of Judah, revealing the corruption of the people, the leaders, the judges, and the false prophets, with no mention of the king; saying:

“I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackals, and a mourning like the ostriches; for her wounds are incurable; for it has come to Judah; it has come to the gate of My people , even to Jerusalem” (Micah 1: 8, 9).

And, “*They covet fields, and take them by violence; also houses and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance; ... Lately My people have risen up as an enemy – You pull off the robe with the garment from those who*

trust you, as they pass by, like men returned from war. The women of My people you cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children; you have taken away My glory forever. Arise and depart, for this is not your rest; because it is defiled, it shall destroy you, even with utter destruction” (Micah 2: 2, 8-10).

“And I said, ‘Hear now, O heads of Jacob, and you rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice? You who hate good and love evil; who strip the sin from My people, and the flesh from their bones; who also eat the flesh of My people, flay their skin from them, break their bones, and chop them in pieces, like meat for the pot. Like flesh in the caldron... Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who make my people stray; who chant ‘Peace’, while they chew with their teeth, but who prepare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths. Therefore, you shall have nights without vision; and you shall have darkness without divination; the sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them” (Micah 3: 1-3; 5-6).

“Hear, O you mountains, the Lord’s complaint, and you, strong foundations of the earth; For the Lord has a complaint against His people; and he will contend with Israel” (Micah 6: 2)

“The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; Every man hunts his brother with a net; That they may successfully do evil with both hands – The prince asks for gifts, the judge seeks a bribe, and the great man utters his evil desire; so they scheme together” (Micah 7: 2, 3).

2- JOTHAM’S CONSTRUCTIONS:

“He built the upper gate of the house of the Lord, and he built extensively on the wall of Ophel” (3)

If his father Uzziah built towers to protect the city (2 Chronicles 26: 9); his son Jotham consummated the fortifications neglected by his father. He fortified the house of the Lord. In the second book of the kings it is mentioned that he built the

higher gate of the house of the Lord, and adorned it; and here there are some more details of his constructions.

“Moreover he built cities on the mountains of Judah; and in the forests he built fortresses and towers” (4)

3- JOTHAM’S CONQUEST OVER THE AMMONITES:

“He also fought with the kings of the Ammonites and defeated them. And the people of Ammon gave him in that year one hundred talents of silver, ten thousand kors of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. The people of Ammon paid him this amount in the second and third years also” (5)

4- THE SECRET BEHIND JOTHAM’S STRENGTH AND PROSPERITY:

“So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his way before the Lord his God” (6)

Jotham is commended because, at least, he did not follow his father’s lead in forcing himself upon priesthood.. It was said *“he became mighty, because he prepared his way before the Lord his God” (6)*, something rarely said about any of the kings mentioned in the Holy Book.

If Uzziah has built towers to protect the city (26: 9), Jotham’s godliness is shown in building towers to protect the temple of the Lord.

Jotham consummated the fortification works neglected by his father; and his godliness was the source of his strength.

The book of the Chronicles did not mention what came in 2 kings 15: 26, concerning God sending Rezin king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah; on

account of that God sent those enemies not for the king's sake, but for that of the people.

5- THE DURATION OF JOTHAM'S REIGN AND HIS DEATH:

"Now the rest of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah" (7)

"He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem" (8)

"So Jotham rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. Then Ahaz his son reigned in his place" (9)

His reign ended prematurely, yet it ended with honor; after having a happy and prosperous life.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 27

CARRY ALL ON YOUR SHOULDER, O SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

- + Glory be to You, who saved Jotham from the fault of his father Uzziah;
You granted him Your grace for the sake of his attachment to You;
He did what was right in Your sight;
And did not pervert like his father to take by force an honor that was not his.

- + Grant me, O Lord the spirit of uprightness, for I am weak and helpless;
Widen the territories of my heart, to desire the salvation of the whole world;
Who can carry humanity, and bring her up, but You?

In my weakness I cry out to You, for my soul is bitter because of those who are astray;

Receive every prayer, fast, and worship before you, for the sake of my brethren.

+ I am the least and the weakest of all;
But my soul moans for the sake of my fellow humans;
You alone can work by Your Holy Spirit in them and in me;
I need Your salvation and Your grace;
Grant my brethren, and my weakness, the conquest by You; to exult in their crowns.

+ Let me stretch my hands together with You on the cross;
To embrace every fallen soul, and present it to You;
Together with every soul that stands up by Your grace, my soul stands up with her;
Lead me away; we will run after you” (Songs 1: 4)
How much my soul desires for all to be saved.

+ When will You come on the clouds, O my Savior?
And Your church from Adam to the end of time will come together?
To bring joy to Your heavenly servants;
And the earthlies will partake of their praise for You?

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CHAPTER 28

AHAZ, THE EVIL KING

Ahaz did nothing good!

After the short reign of the godly king Jotham, Ahaz reigned on Judah, whom the Book introduces as an extremely bad sample of kings in his apostasy from faith. After his father death, Ahaz became king, but he did not walk with the uprightness of heart like his father, but walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, among whom there was no good king.

Because Ahaz closed the house of the Lord, and passed his sons in fire; the Lord delivered him into the hand of the king of Aram and the king of Israel, who led a multitude captives from Judah.

1- The great evil of Ahaz	1 - 4
2- Ahaz collapses before the king of Aram	5
3- Ahaz collapses before the king of Israel	6 - 8
4- The prophet Obed rebukes the army of Israel'	9 - 15
5- Ahaz vainly resorts to Assyria	16 - 21
6- Ahaz resorts to the gods of Damascus	22 - 23
7- Ahaz resorts to other gods	23 - 25
8- Ahaz's disgraceful death	26 - 27

1- THE GREAT EVIL OF AHAZ:

“Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord, as his father David had done” (1)

When Ahaz sat on the throne of Judah, the kingdom was rich and strong, and the worship was well established, thanks to the upright life of his father Jotham. ... Israel, on the other hand, was in a condition of collapse and destruction; and was on the verge of falling into the Assyrian captivity.

Yet, foolishly, Ahaz imitated the falling Israel in oppressing the Lord; and refused to consummate the holy walk of his father. In his days Judah slipped down; lost much; and Ahaz lived a life full of troubles, defeat, and reproach. Yet, the deeper he falls, the more evil he did; counting idol-worship a conquest and salvation. By the death of his father, and sitting on the throne, Ahaz assumed that in the way of corruption there is a kind of freedom and pleasure. By his oppression of the worship of the living God, he did wrong to the truth of God, to himself, and to his people. He followed the lead of the rebellious Israel; and thought of his alliance with Assyria, and taking refuge under its wings, peace and security; But Assyria insulted him, and did not support him. He resorted to the gods of Damascus (Aram), with the assumption that they will be able to save him, to end up collapsed. He resorted to other gods, did evils and abominations, and burned his sons with fire for the idols.

In our commentary on the last chapter we noticed how king Jotham, although he walked with the uprightness of heart all the days of his reign, yet he lacked the talent of bringing the souls forth to God. We did not hear that he ever rebuked the leaders or the people on their horrible corruption, exposed by the prophet Micah with the bitterness of his soul; Nor that he ever raised prayers for their sake. Despite his good works and his faith, he was negligent to exhort his people to return to God, and to refrain from the abominations and transgressions of the pagan worship.

That behavior probably reflected upon the life of his son Ahaz, who plunged in evil to a horrible extent. Not caring for his people, God did not work in the hearts of own sons. We cannot disregard Jotham's negligence in raising his son Ahaz.

It is befitting of us to refer to the view of St. John Chrysostom concerning the responsibility of the parents in raising their children; to perceive our own responsibility toward helping the generations to come to enjoy salvation.

"For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made molded images for the Baals" (2)

"He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel" (3)

In 2 kings 16: 3, and according to the historian, Josephus, it came that he offered his son a burnt offering in the Valley of Hanum; While here he says that he *"burned his children"* (in plural.).

"And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree" (4)

1- AHAZ COLLAPSES BEFORE THE KING OF ARAM:

"Therefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria. He defeated him; and carried away a great multitude of them as captives, and brought them to Damascus.

Then he was also .delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with a great slaughter" (5)

Having given the back to the living God, and resorted to the false gods to protect him, Ahaz fell into the hands of his enemies. God chastised him by the king of Aram who humiliated him, defeated him in the battlefield, and “carried a *great multitude of the children of Judah captives, and brought them to Damascus. Then he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel who defeated him with a great slaughter*” (5)

What happened to Ahaz , his leaders, and his people , is nothing but a repeated story since the fall of our first parents: Adam and Eve, until this very day. For evil, with what it carries of pleasure, is like honey mixed with venom, that delivers man and the nation to perdition. Evil carries failure, humiliation, destruction, and corruption inside it; and there is no way of righteousness, prosperity, and conquest, without the grace of God, that raise us as though from death.

Many fathers present to us practical examples along history, of the danger of evil and forsaking the Lord. Here we mention what is written by the scholar Origen as an example of what we should be aware of. In his interpretation of the verse: “*And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian*” (Judges 6: 1), he said:

+ As long as sin is dormant, the earth would be in peace (Compare with Judges 5: 31). But it is written that the earth was aroused , namely its inhabitants, once sin did; and the souls of men were disturbed “*The Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years; and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel*” (Judges 6: 1).

As long as righteousness prevails on the earth, namely on its inhabitants, it is said that “*The earth was in peace*” (Compare Ezekiel 4: 1-3); But, on the other hand, when oppression increases, and evil is done in the sight of the Lord, , it is said: “God delivered them into the hands of Midian for seven years” (Judges 6: 1). It was never said that the hand of Midian prevailed on the people of God when the people kept the commandments of God. But once

they started to disregard them, the hand of their enemies prevailed, and became more effective on them.

Yes indeed, the power of the carnal enemies becomes stronger when the people commit sin; and when we –called Israel with the spiritual meaning – disregard the commandments of God, our spiritual enemies prevail against us, We are delivered into the hands of our enemies, when our hands separate from the grace.

- + Let us now see what happened to those who, because of their sins, were delivered into the hands of their enemies. It is written: *“Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds, which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, also Amalekites, and the people of the East would come up against them.. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel”* (Judges 6: 2-4). Actually, according to the flesh, Israel suffered much (See 2 Corinthians 10: 18).

Because of their sins, they was delivered into the hands of their enemies who, increased in strength,

As to us, who are called ‘Israel’ according to the Spirit, let us meditate in what could happen. We may sow, and the enemies would never be able to destroy the seeds which we sow; Or they would be able to do. According to the apostle Paul: *“He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Galatians 6: 8). Therefore, those who sow to the flesh, the Midianites will come and destroy what they have sown; Whereas the seed sown to the Spirit, the Midianites cannot destroy; for the hosts of the enemy cannot come up against the spiritual fields, nor can touch the sanctity of the sown fields of the Spirit, of

those who do not sow among the thorns, but “*break up their fallow ground*” (Jeremiah 4: 3; Hosea 10 12; Matthew 13: 22).

3- AHAZ COLLAPSES BEFORE THE KING OF ISRAEL:

“For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed one hundred and twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all valiant men, then because they have forsaken the Lord God of their fathers” (6)

The Lord allowed for Ahaz who followed the lead of the rebellious Israel to be delivered into the hand of the king of Israel the idol-worshipper, who defeated him with a great slaughter; and caused his people to suffer a lot from that chastisement; when the blood of one hundred and twenty thousand men was shed in one day; when the land of Judah was blundered; and the people were scattered. That same people who did not respond with their heart and behavior to the good king Jotham, have collapsed in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham.

In one day, Pekah the son of Remaliah killed 120,000 of the men of Judah, mighty men of valor; captivated 200,000 men, and took plenty of spoil; not just because of the unfaithfulness of the king, but because the people, as well, have forsaken the Lord God of their fathers.. That started the utter collapse of Judah; but as yet, God did not allow anyone to replace the seed of David, but kept His promise to His servant David.

“Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the king’s son, Azrikam the officer over the house and Elkanah who was second to the king”
(7)

“And the children of Israel carried away captives of their brethren two hundred thousand women, sons, and daughters, and they also took away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil in Samaria” (8)

Ahaz walked on the way of Israel; and Israel killed 120,000 men of the mighty men of valor of Judah in one day, something that never happened before in the history of Judah, among whom were leaders, and the king’s son. And carried away captives 200,000 women, sons, and daughters; although the kingdom of Israel at that time was not strong. All that happened because they have forsaken the Lord God of their fathers.

3- THE PROPHET OBED REBUKES THE ARMY OF ISRAEL:

“But a prophet of the Lord was there whose name was Obed, and he went out before the army that came to Samaria, and said to them, ‘Look, because the Lord God of your fathers was angry with Judah, he has delivered them into your hand; but you have killed them in a rage that reaches up to heaven” (9)

“in a rage that reaches up to heaven”, refers to the greatness of their wrath, and of their sin, but God does not endure blood shed and carrying women, sons, and daughters captives.

Together with offering his sons as sacrifices, which involves cruelty, defilement, and hatred of the living God who forbids offering human sacrifices, the sequence of the kings of Judah of David’s household was exposed to the danger of extinction. At that time the prophet Isaiah came to encounter Ahaz, to confirm to him the fall of Aram and Ephraim; And the Lord presented to him a special sign concerning the birth of the Savior God, incarnate from a virgin, .and His name will be Emanuel (Isaiah 7: 10-17).

The other event was the good treatment of the captives from Judah by the Northern kingdom, when, on the stage of events appeared all of a sudden, the prophet Obed to encounter the victorious army of Israel, that came driving the captives of Judah with humiliation, and carrying the spoils, after so much blood shed. He received the army, not to congratulate them on their conquest, but to reveal their sin, and to warn them against the penalty that will dwell on them. For, if God got angry on Judah because they have forsaken Him, and followed the lead of the evil Israel; he demanded from them not to be preoccupied with the conquest, but to consider their own evil; saying: *“Are you not also guilty before the Lord your God? ... the fierce wrath of God is upon you” (10-11).*

What happened was not for the sake of the righteousness of Israel and the justice of their hearts, but for the sake of the iniquity of Judah; as the Lord said on the tongue of the prophet Moses, on their way to cross over the Jordan to dispossess nations greater and mightier than themselves (Deuteronomy 9: 1-5). Hence, the apostle Paul warns us saying: “*Do not be haughty but fear,... for God may not spare you*” (Romans 11: 20-21).

The prophet Obed rebuked those who thought that they were victorious, on the following:

- a- The ferocity by which they killed their brethren on the battlefield, out of hatred, and in a barbaric way; “*The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*” (James 1: 20).
- b- Treating the captives with haughtiness; saying: “*Now you propose to force the children of Judah and Jerusalem to be your male and female slaves*” (10). (They probably had the intention to sell them to other nations)..
- c- He reminded them of their own sins that brought the wrath of the Lord over them; saying: “*Are you not also guilty before the Lord your God?*” (10). He exhorted them to repent their sins, instead of the hatred and gloating on what happened to their brethren. He warned them because what happened to Judah because of their sins, will, one day, dwell upon them as well.

“*And now you propose to force the children of Judah and Jerusalem to be your male and female slaves; but are you not also guilty before the Lord your God?*” (10)

The prophet Obed confirmed to his people that their conquest over Judah, is a chastisement against Judah; reminded them that the center of the divine judgment is in Judah, being the tribe chosen by the Lord; sought from them to consider their own

iniquity against the Lord.(10); and to return to Him; for the sword that God brought over Judah can be brought over them as well.

“Now hear me, therefore, and return the captives, whom you have taken captives from your brethren, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you” (11)

“Then some of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai,

stood up against those who came from the war” (12)

The warning by the prophet Obed brought a good fruit; for four of the heads of the children of Ephraim received with faith the words of the prophet Obed, and took upon themselves to keep Israel from increasing their iniquities because of their treatment to their brethren. Their faith brought forth the repentance of many, which gave the fruit of a practical love toward their captive brethren. Through the faith of those four, they saved the kingdom of Israel from an utter destruction because of the wrath of the Lord over them. Those four stood up, not to congratulate the army on their conquest, but to keep them from entering with their captives into Samaria; in order not to add to Israel's sins more than what they already had.

God looked down on the humiliation of the poor people, heard their cry-outs, and gave them grace before those who captivated them (Psalms 106: 44, 46).

“and said to them, You shall not bring the captives here, for we already offended the Lord; you intend to add to our sins and to our guilt; for our guilt is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel” (13)

As the heads spoke, they listened to them; ... Leaving the captives in that way was certainly from God.

;

“So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the leaders and all the congregation” (14)

In obedience to the heads, men of the army left the captives and the spoils they took, before the leaders; showing true heroism by their obedience to the authority, and by their retreat from what was in their hearts; despite the personal material loss of each one of them.

*“Then the men who were designated by name, rose up and took the captives, and from the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them, dressed them, and gave them sandals,
gave them food and drink, and anointed them; and they let all the feeble ones ride on donkeys; so they brought them to their brethren at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria” (15)*

Looking down on the humiliation of the captives, and the cry-outs of their hearts, God gave them the grace to let the prophet Obed talk as one of authority. The kingdom of Israel at that time was known for their oppression against God Himself and their prophets; whom they often persecuted and killed. But here, the leaders obeyed the prophet Obed, and the whole army listened to the heads. What they did of care for the captives and the wounded among them, was analogous to what the Lord Christ said in his parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10).

4- AHAZ VAINLY RESORTS TO ASSYRIA:

*“At the same time king Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria to help him”
(16)*

In about that time, before the invasion of Rezin and Pekah of Judah See 2 kings 15: 26), Ahaz sought help from Assyria, and did not ask for a sign from the Lord (Isaiah

7: 10-12). He trusted in men, and not in God. He presented to Assyria all the treasures of the king and his men, and also of the house of the Lord. He sacrificed everything for the sake of getting the support and protection of Tiglath-Pilezer Yet the Assyrian king came to him, distressed him, and did not assist him (20-21).

Trusting in the arm of men made him trust in the false gods (23). He forsook the simple atoning altar of the Lord , and resorted to the richly adorned altar of the gods of Damascus. He forsook the living God, apostatized from Him.

It is astonishing that some of the leaders of Israel listened to the voice of the Lord through His prophet Obed; and the army listened to the voice of the heads; whereas the wicked Ahaz did not learn from what dwelt upon him, his army, and his people of chastisement; and instead of returning to God, he resorted to the kings of Assyria to help him.

In that, Ahaz followed the lead of the Chaldeans who resorted to building a city to eternize their name, and a high tower to take refuge in it in case of another great flood to chastise them.

“For again, the Edomites had come, attacked Judah, and carried away captives” (17)

“The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the lowland and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth Shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soshoh, with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages, and they dwelt there” (18)

“For the Lord brought Judah low because of ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah, and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord” (19)

In Amos 1: 6, 9 he talked about how the Philistines and the Phoenicians sold the Jews, captivated by the northern kingdom, to become slaves of the Edomites.

“Also Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, and did not assist him” (20)

In the Assyrian records it came that king Ahaz submitted to Tiglath-Pileser who defeated him.

“For Ahaz took part of the treasures from the house of the Lord, from the house of the king, and from the leaders, and gave it to the king of Assyria; but he did not help him” (21)

Ahaz trusted in Assyria and not in God; and sent a great gift of the treasures of the house of the Lord, the king's house, and of the leaders', to the king of Assyria. Who received it, yet he did not help him; Hence it is written: *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Cursed is man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord’* (Jeremiah 17: 5)

- + It is befitting of us to trust in God alone, and not in anyone else; even if he claims to come from the paradise of God; according to the words of the apostle Paul, saying: *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1: 8)

6- AHAZ RESORTS TO THE GODS OF DAMASCUS:

“Now in the time of his distress, king Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord” (22)

Although the goal of the affliction is repentance and return to God, Yet Ahaz, in the hardness of his heart, increased his treason to God; following the lead of king Amaziah who worshipped the gods of the defeated nation.

7- AHAZ RESORTS TO OTHER GODS:

“For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, saying, ‘Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me’. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel” (23)

Assuming that the gods of Aram have granted them the conquest over him (22-23), Ahaz foolishly worshipped those gods, with hope that he will have conquest as well through them; And he forgot that those same gods were unable to save Aram from the hand of the Assyrians (See Isaiah 7: 13)

“So Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem” (24)

Ahaz got foolishly attached to idol-worship, that he cut the articles of the house of the Lord in pieces, shut up the doors of the temple; namely those of the sanctuary

and the Most h

Holy Place; and all services in the house of the Lord completely ceased. He made for himself, as well altars in every corner of Jerusalem; in an attempt to deliver the people to idol-worship.

“And in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers” (25)

What he did was by intention to challenge the Lord Himself on the level of all cities, by which he provoke God to anger.

8- AHAZ’S DISGRACEFUL DEATH:

“Now the rest of his acts and all his ways, from first to last, indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel” (26)

“So Ahaz rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, but they did not bring him in the tombs of the kings of Israel. Then Hezekiah his son reigned in his place” (27)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 28

**DRIVE, O LORD, EVERY SIN AWAY FROM MY
HEART, TO FIND COMFORT IN YOU**

- + Ahaz sat on the throne;
The leaderships came to pay him homage;

That made him count that nobody, even God Himself, could deny him those pleasures;

He gave his back to the worship of God'

Counting the divine commandment as an unendurable burden;

He assumed that the kings of Israel and all the pagan kings, are happy;

He opened his heart before sin to enter and flourish;

But it, instead, they brought failure, losses, and bitterness over him;

Instead of returning to the source of joy;

He persisted on going steadily from sin to sin;

And set forth from worshipping an idol to worshipping another;

He provoked sin to sit on the throne of his heart'

He lost his inner peace; And collapsed before Aram and Israel;

Yet, instead of returning to God to save him,

He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus to support him.

Assuming that the king of Assyria is able to save him;

He robbed the treasures of the house of the Lord, the king's house, and those of the leaders.

And gave them to him;

Having lost everything in his life, he became miserable;

And in his death, he was not buried in the tombs of the kings.

+ Take away from me every sin and disobedience;

Let my heart find comfort in, and by You;

Set, O Holy One, on Your throne in my heart;

Set Your kingdom in me.

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AN ANNEX TO 2 CHRONICLES 28

QUIK QUOTES FROM AN ESSAY ON

'RAISING CHILDREN AND THE VAIN GLORY'

By

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

The importance of raising the children:

According to St. John Chrysostom, the sacrifice of thanksgiving offered by the parents to God on their children, is to raise them according to what would bring pleasure to God. The parents should not put in their minds that they perform this duty, for the sake of their children, their relatives or their country, but to bring pleasure to God (Chapter 90). Through such pleasure all will enjoy pleasure.

As the birth of a child is a blessing from God, a gift He presents to the parents, it is befitting of them to dedicate him to God,, whom they love and know as their Creator and Father. According to St, John Chrysostom, every child by baptism, Meron, and the Eucharist, will become a son of God by Christ through the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. The responsibility of the parents, therefore is to let their son remain a son of God, follow Christ and His teachings; and strive in the virtues of the Christian life. St. John Chrysostom presented counsel to the parents, both on the positive and the negative aspects, to help them raise their children, and taking away the obstacles that hinder such an important mission.

This essay may suit the city of Antioch in the fourth century; but, bearing positive views, truly suit as well our present century to a great extent.

Raising a child is a holy task:

So St. John Chrysostom, looking at the role of the parents in raising their children, which they practice to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God an object of His pleasure and gladness, St. John does not seek from them to prepare their child to practice the monastic life, but to teach him to be reverend (in the Lord), from their

early youth (Chapter 19). Calling it a holy task, he exhorts the parents to approach their children, not since their birth, but even while still in the womb, as though to holy sanctities, with the spirit of godliness, supported by the Holy Spirit of God; in order to present to God what befit Him, being in fact stewards on this exalted gift from God.

- + To have children is something that touches nature, but to raise them and teach them virtues, concern the mind and will.

- + By the commitment to raise the children, I do not only mean, not to let the children starve to death, the way many believe; for this is loudly proclaimed by nature itself, and needs no books nor references to teach; but what I am talking about is to care for the hearts of the children and their godliness. Whoever abuses such a holy task, commits in some way, a crime of killing children.

- + This commitment concerns the fathers as well as the mothers.. Many fathers would sacrifice everything to provide their children with every enjoyment of pleasure, to make them heirs of rich people; But they never care to make them Christians who practice godliness. ... What blindness, counted as a crime! ... It is in fact a stupid negligence that is responsible for such a bitter confusion that prevails on the society nowadays. If you build up for them great possessions, when they do not know how to walk properly in their life; these possessions will not endure for long with them; but will be scattered and perish together with them; and such inheritance would be a curse rather than a blessing.

- + Your children will always be rich enough, if they receive from you a good raising, capable of conforming their ethical life and behavior. I wish therefore, you strive, not to make them rich, but to make them godly,

masters of their destiny, and rich in virtues. Teach them how not to think about deceptive needs; not to count that they would be honored according to their temporal material level. Compassionately supervise their

behavior, and their choice of friends, and acquaintances. ... Do not expect any mercy to dwell upon them, unless you consummate such a duty.

Follow the lead of the fathers who cared for their children:"

+ Follow the lead of the righteous 'Job' who used to offer sacrifices for the sake of any thing wrong his children might have unintentionally done. (Job 1: 5)

Follow the lead of Abraham who was not preoccupied with seeking riches, as much as for making every member of his household keep the law of God; for whom God testified, saying: "*For I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice* (See Genesis 18: 19).

Coming close to death, David intending to leave to his son Solomon a sure inheritance, he asked him to repeat after him the following wise teachings:" If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth, with all their heart and all their soul, He said that you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel" (1 kings 2: 4)..

Those are role models we should follow lead until our last breath.

COUNSELS TO THE PARENTS

1- Choice of the child's name:

According to the saint, the first lesson parents present to their child is choosing his name, a topic he talked about in some detail; seeking from them not to call the child after the name of one of the household, but to call him by that of one of the saints, the apostles or the bishops (Chapter 47). As though he sought from the parents to

perceive that their child belongs to the heavenly family more than to them or to their household. The child, cherishing the name he has got, striving to liken the martyrs, the apostles, and the bishops, will present his whole heart dedicated to the Lord. A relationship of love will be formed between the child and the saint whose name he carries in the Lord; which will grow with time; and the child would always long to liken him, and would seek his prayers for him, although he would not be an exact copy of him, for every believer has his own unique personality; a unique son of the Lord.

According to this advice, some believe that the first gift given to the child on the day of his birth, or on the day of his baptism, is the icon of the saint whose name he carries. And in case the feast of that saint is on another day, the family should hold a celebration of the feast of the saint to be a feast special for the child who carries his name.

2- Teaching the child to be content and satisfied with what God has given him:

According to the words of the wise Solomon, saying: *“Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great pleasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a fattened calf with hatred”* (Proverbs 15: 16, 17).

3- Directing him toward the Holy Books

St. John Chrysostom seeks from the parents to exhort their children to enjoy reading and studying the Holy Books. For the parents would then reap the first fruit of such a counsel, namely that the children will learn to obey and honor their parents;

On another aspect, because some parents fear that too much care for the Holy Book would probably lead their children to go for the monastic life; the Saint here makes it clear to them that the growth of the children living in this world, need the Word of God more than the monks; for here they confront situations more exciting and

tempting than them. Many parents who care to provide their children with the proper teaching to be qualified for exalted positions in the royal court or in the government, would make them subject to have the spirit of haughtiness and arrogance; for which they are in need for the Holy Book, more so than the monks, to correct their ways.

+ Because it is necessary to counsel the children, the apostle says to the parents: “*And you fathers ... bring your children up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6: 4)

Do you want your child to be obedient? Raise him from the beginning on the teachings and instructions of the Lord.

You who think it not necessary for your child to listen to the Holy Scriptures, should remember that the first thing he hears from them is “*Honor your father and mother*” (Exodus 20: 12). And you will be the first to reap your reward.

Do not say that the Holy Scriptures are meant for the monks. ... Do you wish me to make my child a monk? ... No; it is not necessary for him to become a monk; but to become a Christian.

Why would you fear such a good counsel? ... It is befitting of everyone of us to know the Scripture; which is more necessary for the children.

Let us be role models for them; Let us instruct them from early in their life to read and study the Holy Book.

+ With whom does a monk talk? With the walls of his cell, with his bedcover, with the wilderness, with the trees, or with the hills? ... Striving to be perfect in himself, and not to teach the others; he, therefore is not in need of the same teaching needed by those who live in this world; who confront many sources of temptations, more so than monks, for such teaching, he who lives in the world, will be revered by all. Knowing this, train your children on the knowledge and instructions of the Lord, ...

If the outer appearance alone would raise the value of man, how about his love for the true wisdom, the grantor of enlightenment? Would it not make all

people revere such a man? Would they not unconditionally entrust him on their own households, wives, and children?

- + Tell me; would we not prefer the strong trees which can endure the impact of the storms, the rain, the hail, and any kind of extreme weather; with no need for walls to protect them? He who truly loves wisdom would be as such. He may have nothing, yet he possesses everything; he may seem to have everything, when he actually have nothing.

The wall would not protect the inside, nor would be a natural support; they are only synthetic protection ... The truly rich man is he who truly loves wisdom, who needs nothing of such things. That is why the apostle counsels us to “*bring our children up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6: 4)

- + Let us then heed the counsel of the apostle to have our great reward. If the great artists who draw paintings or make statues of kings, would be worthy of great appreciation; Would God not bless, tens of thousands as much, those who proclaim and adorn His Royal image in man (for man is the image of God)?

When we teach our children to be good, compassionate, and forgiving (which are all features of God); to love their fellow humans, and to count the present world as nothing, we plant virtue in their souls, and proclaim the image of God in them. That is then our duty to teach ourselves and our children in godliness; for how will we ever be able to answer before the throne of Christ for a verdict?... If he who has disobedient children is not qualified for the position of a bishop, how could he be worthy of the kingdom of heaven?

4- Deliver him into the hands of the Lord:

- + Why do you object to be compared to the saintly men and women of the Old Testament? Tell me! Particularly you mothers. Think of Hannah as an example, how she brought Samuel, her only child to the temple while still an infant! Who among you would not wish to have a child like Samuel, who was tens of thousand more exalted than any king in this world? You may say that this is impossible. My son will never be as great as Samuel! ...Why so? Because you in truth do not want him to be. If you deliver him into the hands of God, He will make him as great as Samuel whose mother delivered him into His hands

While Eli the high priest failed to raise his own children, Samuel mother's faith and zeal made her task possible. The infant Samuel was her firstborn and only child, and she did not know if she will ever have another one. Nevertheless she did not say: I shall wait until he grows up and has the chance to taste the pleasures of the world, at least until he is a young man; She rejected all such thoughts, and had only one goal: to dedicate the joy of her heart to God.

You should feel shame, O men, before the wisdom of that woman. By offering Samuel to God, and by delivering him into His hand, her marriage was blessed more and more; on account of that her foremost goal was spiritual. Having dedicated the first fruit of her womb to God, He granted her many other sons; and she saw Samuel revered even in this life.

If men pay honor back with honor, will God not do more to whoever honor Him? when He gives much even to those who do not honor Him! ...How long shall we remain such carnal blocks?... Until when shall we remain attached to the earth? ... Let everything else be in the second place of importance after our care for our children; "*Let us bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*" (Ephesians 4: 6).

5- God, Himself, cares for raising the children:

St. John Chrysostom speaks to us about the great care of God Himself for raising the children, how precious their souls are in His eyes; that He created in the parents the instinct of fatherhood and motherhood; through which each of them would feel the commitment to raise the children. And He put in the law, commandments and statutes that reveal His care for raising the children.

Caring for raising the children, according to St. John Chrysostom, God sought from them to obey their parents, to give the reward by Himself to those who obey; and on another aspect to make the parents cherish their children more; based on God's great care for the children.

- + God's great care for raising children is revealed in how He put in the hearts of parents such natural fondness toward their children; to commit them by necessity to raise them, for which He set specific statutes; and established feasts which He commands us to clarify their significance to our children. About the Feast of Passover, as an example, He said: *"You shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt'"* (Exodus 13: 8).

He did the same thing concerning the law. Speaking about the firstborn, He added again: *"When in the future your child asks you, 'What does this mean?' You shall answer: 'By the strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord every male that opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem'"* (Exodus 13: 14-15).

Through all this God commands him to lead his children to the knowledge of God.

Even concerning the children themselves, God often commanded them to obey their parents; rewarding those who obey, and punishing those who do not.

6- Appreciation of the value and capabilities of the child:

St. John Chrysostom looks at the children with an amazing appreciation and cherishment; he sees in them philosophers, wrestlers, and citizens, conformed and prepared for the eternal dwelling in heaven (Chapters 38, 39). He sees in them great capabilities realized through serious training. He sees in them a city with several gates and entrances. He sees their soul as a city dwelt by good or evil rulers and judges. The child, therefore, is in need of measures that control the wrong behavior. For licentiousness leads to the destruction of the city (Chapters 23-26); And the gates of the city need to be guarded; namely the five senses: the tongue (taste and talk), the sight, the smell, the touch, and the hearing (Chapters 27-37)..

7- Warning against corporal punishment:

The saint makes it clear that setting rules for good behavior without putting them in practice, will make them vain rules (Chapter 26); so is threatening punishment without executing them (Chapter 30). Chastisement and firmness are important issues, yet he warns parents against corporal punishments. (or what is called (spanking by the rod), Which wise parents are counseled to refrain from their continuous use, which may make the child get used to it, and disregard it; and will not plant in him the love of virtue. Let the child fear the punishment, but refrain from perpetually using it. (Chapter 30).

8- Let the teaching and training of the child be according to his specific abilities:

In the words of the apostle: “*Do not provoke your children to wrath*” (Ephesians 6: 4; Colossians 3: 21), in which the saint sees a call to refrain from seeking from the child more than his capabilities and possibilities. It is not befitting to go too far in teaching him (Chapter 52).

9- Teaching by example:

The saint concentrates upon the role of the parents as role models in the life of their children, of whatever they seek their children to be. So that they would follow their lead.

10- Care to check out those who may have influence on the child:

The parents, according to the saint, should not allow those in contact of their children to narrate to them the wrong stories and fantasies, but to narrate instead stories from the Holy Book in an exultant way, together with giving a chance for conversation and debate. And it is unbecoming to disregard the aspect of chastisement by the Lord on the wicked; and befitting to show His love for us. We are therefore committed to be particulate in choosing the nanny of the child.

11- Care to sanctify the senses of the child:

Not talking much about the sense of smell, the saint confirms that the parents should not exaggerate in using the synthetic perfumes. God created the nose to smell the pure air, good for the body, and not to enjoy the synthetic perfumes. Although some may consider this issue of secondary importance, yet the saint confirms otherwise (Chapter 54).

12- The purity of the child's heart:

The saint concentrates upon the care of the parents to direct their child toward the purity of the inner heart; to teach him love, and longsuffering specially toward his younger siblings (Chapter 74); and to treat the servants as his own brothers and sisters (Chapter 72).

13- The chastity and purity in the life of our children:.

The saint seeks from the parents not to allow their children to go to theaters, lest the sexual looseness will crawl into him or her (Chapter 77); but it is befitting of them, instead to make them observe fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, to let them enjoy the life of purity and chastity.

He seeks from them to encourage their child to an early marriage, after enjoying a life of maturity and uprightness to keep his purity.

14- The priority of wisdom in raising children:

The saint shows the importance of the role of the parents in the enjoyment of the child of wisdom that grants him self-control (Chapter 85); provides him with sound concepts of the riches, reputation, and strength, plants in his heart the fear of God (Chapter 85); to make him desire the heavenly rather than the earthly things; and by wisdom to become a good citizen who prudently practice the political issues (Chapter 89).

If we teach them, from the beginning, the love of true wisdom, they will have a greater and better wealth. Teaching him a profitable trade or giving him a higher education, will be counted as nothing compared to teach them to despise riches. He, who does not desire, to surround himself with great wealth, will be truly rich.

+ Do not ask how he would enjoy long life here on earth; but how he would enjoy a limitless eternal life in the life to come. Provide him with the great

issues, and not with the valueless ones. Do not strive to make out of him a clever speaker, but teach him to love the true wisdom. He will suffer nothing if he lacks the talent of uttering clever words; but if he will greatly suffer if he lacks the wisdom; for then all the eloquence in the words in the world will not be able to help him.

I do not mean to disregard the temporal teaching, as something of no value; but not to be confused by it in exaggeration..

15- Keeping our children from pagan practices:

This counsel by the saints still has its importance in this generation in some way or another. As we see how some customs have crawled into the church of the West, like that of 'Santa Claus', who give the children gifts in Christmas day; and the Easter bunny; both of which have almost destroyed the spiritual concept of the two great Feasts: Christmas and the Resurrection (the Christian Passover); and the same thing began to crawl into the East.

In Christmas, it is befitting of us to concentrate on the nativity of the Lord Christ, as a Gift presented by the Father to humanity; together with clarifying that the story of Santa Claus is derived from the person of St. Nicolaus who loved giving gifts. As to the Feast of Palm-Sunday, we should care to provide the children with palm branches to make crosses and hearts out of them; and concentrate on the entrance of the Lord Christ in our hearts, the inner Jerusalem; and to confirm the work of redemption and salvation for the sake of the whole world.

16- Putting no wrong concepts in the minds of our children:

The saint warns the parents against giving shining names to wrong and unbecoming behavior, that would confuse their children, and provoke them to corruption and looseness.

+ It would be evil enough to provoke your children to practice what are against the commandments of God; to add to that, clothing those practices with a veil of shining names. For example to call the continuous

attendance of horse races, and theaters, 'social life'; ... the acquirement of riches ;freedom'; ... the looseness, 'openness', ... the unwise spending 'human practice', ... and the oppression, 'manhood'. And, at the

same time, to call the virtues by lowly names; as for example calling the respectable attire 'a lack of learning'; ... the meekness ;cowardice'; ... the justice 'weakness; ... the humility 'submission'... and refraining from

anger 'helplessness'; by which your child would flee from the virtues as though from a plague.

What is more evil, is to provoke your children to practice evil, not only by your words, but by your example as well; ... You may care to provide them with all luxuries of life, yet you do not care to let them be good. ... you may care for the rocks and trees, but you do not care as much for their souls. You may care to put a beautiful statue and a golden ceiling to your house; but you have no consideration for the soul which are more valuable than all the golden things.

When you see your child physically ill, you do everything possible to make him well again; but when you notice how his soul is not as it should be, you may just say that he is in no need of medical treatment;; then you claim to call yourself a parent.

17- Care for the salvation of our children:

+ We may provide our children with every possible way to teach them the temporal knowledge, to give them the chance to serve the temporal authorities well, But to provide them with the knowledge of the holy faith and the ministry to the heavenly King, these issues are not as valuable in our

sight. We may allow them to attend theaters, but do not care for their attendance of the church and for standing with reverence in it. If we care to follow up what they have been taught in the school,. Why do not we ask them what they have heard in the Sunday school?

18- Care to teach and train our children on temporal issues:

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Concentration on the heavenly wisdom, and on training our children through the Word of God, according to St. John Chrysostom, does not mean to disregard teaching them the temporal knowledge, and training them on temporal issues.

+ You may say: 'What? Shall we seek the wisdom, and forsake everything earthly? ... No! For that would be against wisdom! And even contrary to it; that would destroy and corrupt everything.

19- Encouraging our children to consecrate themselves to God:

The way the saintly fathers support their children; and their blessing would remain supporting their grandchildren to several generations, So are the saintly children who consecrate their hearts and their lives, they would be a blessing to their fathers. For the sake of the prophet David, God blessed his son Solomon, and some of his grandchildren like king Hezekiah. And the prophet Samuel who came as a fruit of his mother's prayers, has been the secret of blessing to his mother.

+ Let us allow our children to minister to God; to lead them, not to the temple as it happened to Samuel; but to heaven itself to minister together with the angels and the archangels. For it would be possible for anyone to see him who dedicate his life for the true love of wisdom, as ministering together with the angels; Hence such children will stand before God in great daring, not only for their own sake, but for ours as well.

If some children get help from God for their fathers' sake, the fathers will even get more help for their children's sake. In the first case, help will come through nature; whereas in the second case it would come through the proper raising of the children, which is more important than nature; for which I shall try to provide you with the following proofs from the Holy Scripture:.

The virtuous and godly king Hezekiah, would not be able to confront the great danger that threatened him without the help of God for the sake of his father David, God said: *"I will defend this city, and save it for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake"* (2 kings 19: 34).

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to his disciple Timothy says: *"Nevertheless she (the mother) will be saved in childbearing, if she continues in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control"* (2 Timothy 2: 15).

And the Holy Book commends the righteous 'Job', for being blameless and upright, for fearing God and shunning evil (Job 1: 1), and also for his care for his children (Job 1: 5).

20- If you do not raise your son yourself, time will raise him:

- + If the good parents strive to the proper raising of their children, there will be no need for laws, judges, courts of justice, and punishments. For all these were created because of our lack of ethical values.

21- The crime of negligence in raising children:

St. John Chrysostom often warned the parents against negligence in raising their children, counting it as one of the most serious of all sins; even to call it 'killing children'.

- + If you consummate the commandments of the law in all other issues, but you are not faithful concerning this specific commandment, you will be severely punished. Going through the history of people of the old, you will see the horrible punishment that dwelt upon the parents who were negligent in raising their children.

There was among the Jews a high priest, revered for his meek personality, by the name of Eli. He had two sons, also priests, who delivered themselves to every kind of sin. The father did not care much for this issue, and even disregarded it. But when it went too far, he rebuked them, yet not with the befitting zeal and authority. As a high priest and a father, he ought to punish them severely to correct their evil ways, but he did not, he just gave them a mild advice, saying: "*Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people*" (1 Samuel 2: 23). Was this the proper way to rebuke them? Although they disobeyed the one to whom they were indebted for their existence, he still accepted them as members in his household. His advice was vain and useless. He should have terrified them to uproot the blindness from their hearts....

They became victims of such evil meekness by their father. In a battle those miserable persons were among the casualties; and when the father got the news of their death, he fell off the seat, his neck was broken and he died (1 Samuel 4: 18). Now you may appreciate what I told you, that the parents negligent in raising their children are their killers.

Eli the priest should only blame himself for the death of his sons. Yes! They were killed by the sword of the enemy; but it was actually the vain negligence of their father that aimed the deadly strike against them; for, as the heavenly help forsook them, they were bare before the arrows of the Philistines. The father destroyed both himself and them.... Yet we still see this same issue before our eyes every day. We see a multitude of parents who are negligent

in taking this important task upon themselves, to correct the delinquent behavior of their children.

For fear of annoying their children by continuously addressing them with harsh words, in an attempt to control their wrong tendencies, these miserable children would end up more delinquent, to dare commit criminal acts, that may bring them forth to the courts of justice, and be condemned by law

Rejecting your legitimate rights over them, you deliver them to civil verdicts, and to the firm sword of human justice to condemn them. Fearing to put on them such a light verdict in your presence, what a horrible thing for a father to see his son no more around, and chased by the law everywhere!

+ The negligence in raising children is one of the major sins; and is even the most ungodly. If we do not care for the salvation of our own children, we, ourselves, shall fall under the severest kinds of punishment.

+ The corruption of the children does not come from void, but from the foolishness of parents who care only for the earthly issues, and consider anything else of secondary importance, that may provoke them involuntarily to neglect the souls of their children. I say that such parents (not out of anger in me), are more evil than the killers of children. For the later separate the body from the soul, whereas the former, (the negligent parents) cast both in the fire of Hell.

Death is unavoidable according to the natural system, but the other destiny is avoidable, if the parents would do it. The corporal death can come to an end in the moment of resurrection; but no reward waits for the lost soul. She will not enjoy the resurrection, but will endure eternal sufferings. We therefore, not unjustly, call those parents worse than the killers of children. It is not as cruel, to sharpen a sword, hold it by your right hand, and pierce with it the

heart of a child; like destroying and humiliating his soul; as nothing is equal to the soul.

22- Let us care to prepare them for the holy matrimony:

It so seems, as we said before, that some parents fear to let their children go deep in studying the Holy Book, lest they end up longing for the monastic life. To them the saint made clear that he who lives in the world is in more need of the Word of God to discipline and sanctify him, to live holy and prosperous in the world, and to deal with the others. Now the saint confirms the need of the children for the holy raising which prepares them for the holy matrimony.

- + If we manage to put limits for the children in an early stage of their life, we shall not be in need of a greater effort later on in their life; because it will be a habit and a law for them. ... Let us then not allow them to practice what bring pleasure to them if it is harmful. Let us not be easy on them just because they are children; for that will harm them more than anything when they grow up.

Let us choose wives for them in an early age, to unite with their brides with pure and uncorrupt bodies. Whoever was chaste before marriage will continue to be chaste in marriage; but whoever practiced adultery before marriage, will do the same thing while being married. It is written in the Holy Scripture: *"To a fornicator all bread is sweet"* (Sirach 23: 17). For this reason, during the holy wedding, a crown is placed upon the head of the bride and the groom (in the altar), as a sign of conquest; for they are entering into the secret place of matrimony victorious, and not overcome by evil desire,

Whoever plunges in evil desire, and deliver himself to adultery; what will be the need to place a crown upon his head, for he is defeated? ... Let us then

plant this in our children, let us teach it to them; let us threaten and warn them in every possible way.

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THE REFORM IN THE ERA OF KING HEZEKIAH

(CHAPTERS 29 to 32)

What Ahaz has done to annul the worship of the living God, closing the gates of the temple, resorting to the idols, delivering the treasures of the house of the Lord, of the king's house, and the houses of the leaders to the king of Assyria; and continuously going ahead with his evil practices, were reason enough to remove the kingdom of Judah of being the people of God. But the faithfulness of God, His love of all humanity, and His desire to realize His divine promises to let the Son of David sit a King by the cross; made him set Hezekiah king over Judah; Now, everything is changed; the light of the divine grace shines in the temple of the Lord, instead of the darkness that prevailed in the days of Ahaz.

The second book of the Chronicles dedicated four chapters to talk about the reforms of king Hezekiah, and observing the Passover. The second book of the kings gave us a short account of his reforms (2 kings 18: 4-7); And the prophet Isaiah talked to us about this king in a number of historical chapters. Those three books that showed the work of God in the life of this good king, revealed the following points:

- a- The only condition to establish the kingdom of the Son of David, and Judah as the people of God, is to reestablish the worship, and purify the temple, or reorganizing the Levite priesthood. And the best way to start it is to purify the inner temple of the Lord from every sin and slothfulness.

- b- King Hezekiah sat on the throne in a period during which the people have almost lost every hope in reform. The cities of Judah have lost all their

main resources; the army suffered a series of bitter defeats; Assyria betrayed them after receiving a plenty of the treasures of the house of the Lord, the royal palace, and the houses of the leaders; and the battlefield turned into a pool of blood in one day, on the hand of Israel.

In the midst of that very dark portrait, God sent a righteous man to proclaim that He does not wish for His people's perdition, but for their salvation; and that, in every generation there are certain faithful people, true to the divine truth.

- c- There were indeed other great periods of reform in the history of the kingdom of Judah; but we shall not find a greater one in such a time when evil reached its climax. God sends the right man in the right time.
- d- The negative reforms carried out by Hezekiah, according to the second book of the kings, were removing the high places, breaking down the statutes, and crushing the bronze serpent, set by the prophet Moses, then abused by the people later on. As instead of looking up to it by faith as a symbol of the cross of the Savior Messiah, it became the object of a fatal literal worship, to be mockingly called 'Nehushtan' by Hezekiah.

Here, nothing came concerning the siege put on Samaria by Shalmaneser king of Assyria; but the book only cared to show how the ten tribes rejected the worship of the living God, and replaced it with idol-worship.

In the second book of the Chronicles we see Hezekiah's positive reforms..

The reforms of Hezekiah:

In His faithfulness to realize His promise to David, God allowed for the appearance of a good king, after the evil king Ahab almost destroyed the kingdom of Judah.

The era of Hezekiah is considered a new stage, or a new beginning, not only for the kingdom of Judah, but for the whole people of God. Hezekiah's heart, being ignited with love toward the salvation of the whole people, he set, not a military or commercial treaty between the Southern and the Northern kingdoms, but a unity in the Lord, set upon the renewal of the covenant with God, and the attachment to the temple, so that all would enjoy the divine strength, and experience the true joy of the spirit.

The first step taken by the king through the priests and the Levites, was to cleanse the temple, that was defiled by his father Ahaz; which was done in a record time; and the songs of praise by the psalms were again heard, with joy for the fellowship with God.

The second step to realize the unity on a sound spiritual basis was to celebrate the Feast of Passover; the Feast celebrating the anniversary of the enjoyment by the people of Israel of the liberation from the bondage of Pharaoh, and the setting forth to the wilderness, to cross over to the promised land. According to some scholars, Hezekiah is considered another Solomon; and his magnificent successor; for he was only preoccupied with uniting all the tribes in a sound spiritual way, and calling them to Jerusalem to celebrate together the Feast of Passover.

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CHAPTER 29

KING HEZEKIAH AND SANCTIFYING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The book considers king Hezekiah as one of the great kings of Judah.

Hezekiah's life shows the role of the prophets in the eighth century B.C., particularly Isaiah and Micah; while Jeremiah was in the days of Josiah.. According to some, king Hezekiah is counted as the link connecting between two periods of prophesies. Hezekiah paved the way for the Josiah's reform of observing the law of God.

Since the first year of his reign, Hezekiah got preoccupied with the holy worship of the Holy God, more than any others of the good kings. His heart was kindled with the divine love and jealousy on the holiness of the house of the Lord. In his first year he did the following:

- 1- Hezekiah brings back the priests and the Levites to the house of the Lord;
1 - 11
- 2- Hezekiah exhorts the Levites to cleanse the house of the Lord
12 - 19.
- 3- Hezekiah makes atonement for the sins of the previous reign
20 - 24
- 4- Hezekiah cares for offering sacrifices of praise and burnt offerings
25 – 36

1- HEZEKIAH BRINGS BACK THE PRIESTS AND THE LEVITES TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

“Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah” (1)

Because of his young age and little experience, he depended on the counsel of the older priests and Levites; something counted by the book of the Chronicles as a point in his favor; he could have been under the guidance of the prophet Isaiah..

The book referred to the names of his mother and his grandfather; for they were righteous, and had good influence on Hezekiah in his youth.

“And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done” (2)

About some of the preceding kings, it was said that they did what is right in the sight of the Lord; but it was rarely said: “... *according to all that his father David had done*”; namely according to David’s zeal and faithfulness.

“In the first year of his reign in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them” (3)

Joash sat on the throne after two corrupt kings when he was seven years old; and the same thing happened with Josiah who was eight years old when he reigned after two corrupt kings; In both cases there was a delay in starting the work of reform. But in the case of Hezekiah who reigned when he was twenty-five years old, he started the reform in his first year of his reign.

We cannot portray the extent of sorrow in Hezekiah's heart to see his father worshipping idols, and closing the house of the Lord. But, although he could do nothing during the life of His father, yet he was very bitter..

According to some, although his father closed the gates of the temple before the people, yet some of the Levites who could sneak in, kept the holy fire kindled; until Hezekiah came, and opened the gates of the temple; to find the holy fire already kindled.

“Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East square” (4)

“The East square” was a wide area before the East gate of the outer court of the temple, where Hezekiah gathered together the priests and the Levites to remove the abominations put by his father. By that he practically confessed his father's sin, and proclaimed his serious desire to reform what his father had corrupted. He confessed that his fathers have betrayed the Lord, did evil in His eyes and have forsaken Him (60; not to criticize them, but to set forth, together with the leaders and the people to reform the corruption.

It is so befitting of the believer, not to surrender to sorrow over the past, but to treat the corruption that dwelt over him in practical positive way like what Hezekiah has done. It is good to mourn our sins, yet we should not despair; but by the divine grace set forth to work with the spirit of hope and strength.

“And said to them, ‘Hear me Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place” (5)

Gathering together the priests and the Levites in the East square, Hezekiah demanded from them to sanctify themselves, and to sanctify the house of the

Lord by removing all the signs of idol-worship, the Assyrian alter, the abominations connected to idol-worship, and all the rubbish that resulted from ceasing the services in the days of Ahaz..

- + In the present world, if a king intends to live for some time in a certain place which is not clean enough; his servants, before he comes, would clean, purify, adorn the place, and spray sweet perfumes in it. How much more preparations would the house of the soul and the heart need for the Lord to dwell in them? He who, Himself is pure of any defilement.

- + Everyone of us should, therefore, diligently strive to acquire virtue, to believe and to seek it from the Lord, in order that the inner man would become a fellow in glory in the present life; and for the soul to have fellowship in the holiness of the Spirit (1 John 1: 3); So that, once we are purified from the defilement of sin, we would, in the resurrection, have what we cover the nakedness of our bodies when they arise from the dead; to cover our shortcomings, to find comfort in the kingdom of heaven forever.

(St. Maccari the Great)

“For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God; they have forsaken him, have turned their faces away from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs on him” (6)

Hezekiah did not accuse his father alone of corruption, but many kings, priests, and Levites, and even the people have contributed in it; hence he said: *“For our fathers have transgressed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God, they have forsaken Him”*

It is good to remember the faithfulness and loyalty of many of our fathers along the generations; but we should, as well, not forget the slothfulness and negligence of some of them, and even their treason and denial of faith.

“they have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense, or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel” (7)

Here, Hezekiah confessed the evils done by his fathers, as though he, himself committed them, and intends to repent:

- a- *“They turned their faces away from the habitation of the Lord” (6)*. Which is the most serious of all sins, *“to give the back and not the face to the Lord”*; namely the perversion of the heart and forsaking the Lord; something for which the Lord often admonished His people; as saying on the tongue of the prophet Jeremiah: *“Saying to a tree, ‘You are my father’, and to a stone, ‘You gave birth to me. For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble, they will say: ‘Arise and save us”* (Jeremiah 2: 27). *“They did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imaginations of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward”* (Jeremiah 7: 24); *“They have turned to Me the back and not the face; though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not listened to receive instruction”* (Jeremiah 32: 33); *“For My people have committed two evils: ‘They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no waters”* (Jeremiah 2: 13).

- b- *“They have also shut the doors of the vestibule” (7)*, so that no one would enter into the house of the Lord, to enjoy the fellowship with Him. Namely, they did not enter and did not let others do. That is the work of the devil, to

use every possible way to deny men of entering into the house of the Lord, for it is the icon of heaven.

The book of psalms cared to present to the believers the Psalms of Ascents (of the steps) (Psalms 120 to 134), written in a little booklet, to let them perceive that they are ascending up to the house of the Lord, the icon of heaven in Jerusalem.

- + Why then, do those who dwell in Jerusalem are never shake forever, except because there is another Jerusalem, they long to reach? for the sake of whom we moan and sigh in this journey of ours, to return to her ... the eternal Jerusalem, our mother who is in heaven.

(St, Augustine)

c- ***They put out the lamps***” The lamps refer to the divine light. The Lord Christ the Light of the world shone on those who sit in the darkness, to become, by His Holy Spirit, the light for the world. Yet, on account of that the devil is the prince of the kingdom of darkness, not enduring the divine light; hence he provoked the wicked kings to put the lamps out.

- + Great is the love of Christ, who gave all His titles to His disciples. He says to them: “*I am the Light of the world*” (John 8: 12); then He follows it by saying: “*You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5: 14). He says to them: “*I am the living bread*” (John 6: 31); then, “*We are one bread*” (1 Corinthians 10: 17). He says: “*I am the true vine*” (John 15: 1); then he adds: “*I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality*” (Jeremiah 2: 21)

- + If you intend to find Him, the Sun has shone now; Come along like those women; namely, I wish there is no darkness of evil in your hearts; for the evil desires of the flesh and the evil works are darkness; and whoever has such darkness in his heart will never behold the light, nor perceive Christ; for Christ is Light. Now, O brethren, cast the darkness away from your hearts, namely cast away from yourselves the evil desires and works; Acquire the sweet goodness, namely the prayers with zeal, saying together with the psalmist: *“Let my prayer be set before You as incense”* (Psalm 141: 2)... In case you wish to see God, and to come to your heavenly dwelling place, you are committed to forsake evil; and persist on abidance in the goodness with which you have started..

- + If He is the true Light that gives light to every man; He must have given light to John the Evangelist, who confessed, saying: *“Of His fullness we have all received”* (John 1: 16).

(St. Augustine)

“You have not burned incense”; Burning incense refers to prayer; as it came in the book of Revelation about the twenty-four elders who offer God incense which is the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5: 8).

- + The psalms grant the soul peace and tranquility; calm down the confusion of mind, and the accumulation of evil desires. The Holy Book is the book of love; ... a weapon against the devil; ... a cause of rest after the labor of the day; ... a comfort for the elders; ... a stirrer of our joy and our holy sorrows; ... a superb song; ... the voice of the church; ... the sweet fragrance of incense.

(St. Basil the Great)

d- **“They have not burned burnt offerings”**, The sacrifices of all kinds refer to diverse sides of the cross of the Lord Christ. The burnt offering refers to the sacrifice of Christ, who, in His love for mankind, arose on the cross as a redemption for the believers. Our fellowship with the crucified Christ makes us like a burnt offering or a sacrifice of love to God.

- + The burnt offerings are when the sacrifice is wholly consumed by fire on the altar. I wish the divine fire of wisdom consume us whole, and raise us high up, Not only our souls, but our body as well; to gain eternity. Let it be offered then, as a burnt offering, for death to be swallowed

(St. Augustine)

+ Both the body and the soul, namely man as a whole, wish to be a holy sacrifice to God; as proclaimed by the psalmist, saying: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit”* (Psalm 51:17).

- + Let us offer our spirit a sacrifice by fasting. For we cannot offer God a better sacrifice; as confirmed by the prophet , saying: *“The sacrifice of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise”* (Psalm 51: 17). Offer yourself, O man, to God; Offer the offering of fasting. Do that to make yourself a pure sacrifice, a holy sacrifice; a living sacrifice, that remain yours while you offer it to God

“Therefore the wrath of God fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to astonishment and to jeering as you see with your eyes” (8)

This probably refer to the serious defeat and the extensive losses to Judah; when 120,000 were killed and 200, 000 were captivated on the hand of the kingdom of Israel (2 Chronicles 28: 6, 8).

Hezekiah was convinced that what dwelt upon Judah of afflictions were caused by the perversion of the king, the leaders, and the people, from the way of uprightness in the eyes of the Lord.

Ahaz did wrong when he attempted to treat the troubles in an absolutely human way; through seeking the help of Assyria against the enemies surrounding him. Hezekiah, on the other hand, put in his heart that there is no salvation from evil and troubles except by returning to God and trusting in Him. He believed that the kingdom of God has the priority in everything.

As it would be idiocy and foolishness to start building a house, then lay the foundations afterwards, we, likewise cannot move first by our strength, possibilities, thoughts, and human experience; But, let God be the First and the Leader; Let Him sanctify all our movements, thoughts, and possibilities. Let the kingdom of God be the inner foundation in the heart, on which every thought, word, and work, be set.

By “**jeering**” (8) here, Hezekiah probably means what came in (Micah 6: 16); For, when desolation happens to any land or any people, their enemies would scoff them, and jeer in ridicule. It was befitting of the people of God to be the

object of admiration by the heavenly creatures; but through forsaking the Lord, they came to be the object of ridicule of the non-believers.

“For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons, our daughters, and our wives, were in captivity” (9)

Hezekiah confessed that they are worthy of the afflictions that dwelt upon them, on account of their treason; and made it clear to them the consequences of forsaking the Lord, the slothfulness of attaching to Him, and of worshipping Him; to be a motivation to renew the covenant with God and to have fellowship with Him.

“Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us” (10)

In all his reforms, Hezekiah was preoccupied with making a covenant with the Lord, to have reconciliation with God the Father. Saying, “***in my heart***” reveals his persistence to do that by his whole heart. And seeks the fellowship of all with him. For the covenant is with the God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from them; namely from the king, the leaders, and all the people.

“My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense” (11)

Although he was young, he called them: “***My sons***”; probably because he felt as a king, the commitment to care for everyone as beloved children, for whom he will be questioned before the Lord. It was the duty of the priests and the Levites to remind the king of his relationship with God, but here we see the king remind them that they were chosen by God to serve Him and to minister to Him. He exhorts them to reconsider themselves, speaking like a father to his children;

saying: ***“My sons, do not be negligent now”*** (11). How great of the one with authority to bear the compassionate, yet serious spirit of fatherhood, at the same time.

2- HEZEKIAH EXHORTS THE LEVITES TO CLEANSE THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

“Then these Levites arose: Mahath the son of Amasai and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites, of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi and Azariah the son of Lehalelell of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah and Eden the son of Joah” (12)

Here we see serious work, good work, needed work; namely cleansing the house of the Lord.. Those assigned to perform this work were priests and Levites, who were supposed to keep the house of the Lord pure; but having been slothful in doing it, the king demanded from them to make it their priority. He mentioned the names of many Levites, two of each of the three main families: the Kohathites, the Gershonites, and the sons of Merari (12). And he also mentioned two of each of the three families of the singers: Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (13-14); he mentioned them probably on account of that they were more zealous and active than the rest.

“Of the son of Elizapham, Shimri and Jeiel; of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah” (13)

‘Of the sons of Heman, Jehiel and shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel” (14)

“And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord” (15)

The zeal of the king had its activity in those mentioned for the work of cleansing the house of the Lord; who *“gathered their brethren, and went according to the commandment of the king”*. The word of the Lord worked in the heart of the king, who exhorted the priests and the Levites, who in turn exhorted one another to do the job.

The act of cleansing the house of the Lord, involved:

- a- Removing the dust accumulated on everything, as a result of being closed and neglected
- b- Cleansing it from the idols and the altars of the idols set in it; counted as filth that defiled the altar of the Lord, more so than the dust and the spider-webs.

“Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the Lord to the court of the house of the Lord, and the Levites took it out and carried it to the brook Kidron” (16)

As the Levites were not allowed to enter the sanctuary, the priests entered, cleansed, and brought the trash out for the Levites to carry away.

“Now they began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the Lord. Then they sanctified the house of the Lord in eight days; and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished” (17)

The humility of the king, his love, and zeal, have motivated the Levites to work hard, that they sanctified the house of the Lord in two weeks (17). With an exalted and serious work they started at the beginning of the first month; which

involved the good news of a new blessed year. They cleansed the temple in eight days, and sanctified the house of the Lord in another eight days.

“Then they went in to king Hezekiah and said, ‘We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of the burnt offerings, with all its articles, and the table of the showbread with all its articles’ (18)

“Moreover all the articles which king Ahaz in his reign has cast aside in his transgression we have prepared and sanctified; and there are, before the altar of the Lord” (19)

Ahaz cast away the articles of the house of the Lord; and did not use them, but used instead things that suited the idol-worship. That was beside breaking things up, as for example the bronze bulls.

They presented a report to King Hezekiah on what they have achieved in sixteen days; not seeking a material reward, but to inform him that all things defiled have been purified according to the law, and became ready for use.

The book shows that the pitch darkness caused by Ahaz, has started to scatter by the light that shone in the sanctuaries in the days of Hezekiah. In the ‘Tergom’ it came that all the vessels defiled by Ahaz through being used in idol-worship, in disobedience to the Word of God, and became detested before Him, were gathered together, hidden, and replaced by other vessels put before the Lord.

The devil managed to distance the people away from God in the days of Ahaz; then came Hezekiah, the symbol of Christ, to renew the hearts for His divine glory.

3- HEZEKIAH MAKES ATONEMENT FOR THE PREVIOUS REIGN:

“Then king Hezekiah rose early, gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord” (20)

Wasting no time, the king together with all the rulers of the city rose early the day following presenting the report, and went up to the house of the Lord.

“And they brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah. Then he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the Lord” (21)

Those sacrifices were more than demanded by the law (Leviticus 4: 13); for the law demands one bull or calf for the sins of the people, and one ram for the sins of the king (the ruler). Yet what came in the book of Leviticus mean the sins committed through ignorance; but Hezekiah intended to offer sacrifices for all the sins, like idol-worship, apostasy from faith, and defiling the temple; beside the sacrifices for the sanctification of the sanctuary, the priests and Judah; hence he offered more than the law demanded.

The priests offered sin offerings for the kingdom (21), for atonement for all Israel (24); as the purification would not be realized without the blood of the sacrifice; namely we shall not enjoy forgiveness except by Christ who became a sin offering. The sacrifices were offered for the sins of the king, the rulers, the priests, and all the people (Leviticus 4: 13-14; Numbers 15: 24-25)

“So they killed the bulls, and the priests received the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. Likewise they killed the rams, and sprinkled the blood on the altar. They also killed the lambs, and sprinkled the blood on the altar” (22)

“Then they brought out the male goats for the sin offering before the king and the congregation, and they laid their hands on them” (23)

The sin offering was offered before the king and the whole congregation, and they laid their hands on them, confessing that they were sinful and worthy of death; but that the sacrifice will die for their sake.

“And the priests killed them, and they presented their blood on the altar as a sin offering to make an atonement for all Israel, for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering be made for all Israel” (24)

The priests and the Levites were committed to get sanctified, before offering the sin offering (20-30) for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and all Judah.

Hezekiah was the first king of Judah who wished to sanctify all Israel, and to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast.

Assyria destroyed the kingdom of Israel in the year 722 B.C., six years before the enthronement of king Hezekiah. Under the reign of emperor Sargon the second, they carried away a great number of the people of Israel captives to distant locations; and only few were left in Israel. For those few left, king Hezekiah felt responsible, to do every thing possible toward the unity of the two kingdoms; an intention shown in the following chapters. In the present chapter, the priests offered sacrifices as atonement for all Israel (24); and the burnt offering was made in the name of all Israel (27)

+ Those sacrifices were symbols that prophesied about the One saving Sacrifice; for we were not left without a Sacrifice (the crucified Christ) to offer to God.

In your own soul, you should offer what you intend to offer.

Do not seek to slay from a flock outside yourself; for in you, there is what you should slay.

5- HEZEKIAH CARES FOR OFFERING SACRIFICES OF PRAISE AND BURNT OFFERINGS:

“Then he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets” (25)

“According to the commandment of David”; namely according to the system put by David, Gad, and Nathan. Here we notice that the joy and the praise were realized after the enjoyment of the forgiveness of sins.

- + Now, when we gather together in the church, we praise God. But once everyone goes to his work, it so seems that we cease praising God. I wish no one of us would cease to lead the upright life, by which he would be perpetually praising God. You would cease to praise God when you pervert from doing justice, and everything that bring pleasure to God. Otherwise your life would be always eloquent; and God’s ear would be open to your heart.
- + Everything you do, do it right; for by this you praise God.
- + There, we shall find comfort; shall see; love, and praise.
- + If even the angels, with their simple and spiritual nature, are said to have tongues with which they sing praise to their God and Creator, giving Him

thanks without ceasing; how much more would the spiritual bodies of men do after the resurrection; for all the members of the glorified body would have tongues in their mouths, by which they would utter divine praises full of words expressing the love and joy.

(St. Augustine)

- + Singing praise is good in itself; and the psalm presents many good things; it separates the mind from the earth, gives wings to the soul, light wings capable of flying in air; hence the apostle Paul says: “*singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5: 19) ... There is need for singing praise for the sake of the life, prayer, and prosperity of the singer.
- + Give thanks to the Lord, praise Him, who tests you in the furnace; utter praise instead of blasphemy; for this is the way by which that blessed man ‘Job’ expressed himself.
- + That is the way by which the righteous ‘Job’ offered the sacrifice of praise, despite the horrible calamities beyond the endurance of man, that dwelt on him

(St. John Chrysostom)

“The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets” (26)

After making the atonement, it became possible to offer praise to the Lord. After offering the sin offering, the burnt offerings were offered, accompanied with the sound of the trumpets and singing the song of God. Together with confessing our

sins, we offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise as a burnt offering of love to God. We are in need, not only of the forgiveness of our sins, but to accompany them with the exultation for the love of God and His mercy.

Sounding the trumpets, is done by the priests, for it refers to the Word of God, or the divine commandment; by which the priests are committed to exhort all on obeying the commandment.

‘Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the lord also began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel’ (27)

In the days of Ahaz, the daily service of God ceased, and the people lost their enjoyment of offering the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, as well as the inner joy.

- + This sacrifice comes out of the heart, is nourished by faith, observes the truth; enters in innocence, purity, chastity, and adorned with love. We are committed to guard it by the greatness of good works, offering psalms, and singing praise, on the altar of God, to get everything from Him.

(The scholar Tertullian)

“So all the congregation worshipped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished” (28)

“And when they had finished offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed and worshipped” (29)

“Moreover king Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praise with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped” (30)

It is said that they praised the Lord by the words of David, namely his psalms, having been the king of Israel before the division (30). If sin has brought forth an atmosphere of grief and depression, the enjoyment of forgiveness and the fellowship with God, specially in His house, through the sacrifice of the Lord Christ, will turn our life into a joyful and exultant celebration.

By bowing and worshipping before God, the king and all those present proclaim that they became in fellowship with the heavenly creatures, who praise and worship Him with joy and gladness. .

“Then Hezekiah answered and said, ‘Now that you have consecrated yourselves to the Lord, come near, and bring sacrifices and thanks offerings into the house of the Lord’.

So the congregation brought in sacrifices and thanks offerings; and as many as were of a willing heart brought burning offerings” (31)

By offering sacrifices and thanksgiving offerings to the house of the Lord as many as were of a willing heart (31 etc.), the people consecrated the worship to God alone, without any fellowship with idol-worship.

“And the number of burnt offerings which the congregation brought was seventy bulls, one hundred rams, and two hundred lambs; all these were for a burnt offering to the Lord” (32)

Although the people generously offered their gifts, yet it was not as plenty as they were in the days of Solomon. For then, all the tribes represented one kingdom;

but now Hezekiah was king over the kingdom of Judah from which ten tribes were dissented to form the Northern kingdom of Israel. On another aspect, the people have become poor; and the series of wicked kings have weakened their godliness.

“The consecrated things were six hundred bulls and three hundred sheep” (33)

“But the priests were too few, so that they could not skin all the burnt offerings; therefore their brethren the Levites helped them until the work was ended, and until the other priests had sanctified themselves for the Levites were more diligent in sanctifying themselves than the priests” (34)

Concerning the peace offerings and others, the Levites slaughtered and skinned them; whereas the burnt offerings which are wholly consumed on the altar, were only touched by the priests, except in rare cases as it was in the present one.

There were more Levites than priests, and were more diligent in sanctifying themselves (34); contrary to the situation after the return from captivity, as is mentioned in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah..

And we should not forget that some priests have been denied working in the house of the Lord, on account of that they served on the high places.

“Also the burnt offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace offering, and with the drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of the house of the Lord was set in order” (35)

“Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly” (36)

The king moved with the speed of his fiery heart, and his longing to open up the house of the Lord, to re-establish the worship in it. The secret of success was the strong and sudden work of the Lord Himself, who prepared the people (35=36), and the return of the king, the leaders, and the people, has been realized through the work of the grace of God.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 29

THE PURITY AND THE PROSPERITY

- + Hezekiah sat on the throne when he was twenty-five years old;
He inherited a state burdened with corruption and desolation;
He was raised by a father who challenged God and His prophets;
But Hezekiah, himself, inclined his ears to God and His prophets;
Since his youth he perceived that purity is behind every prosperity;
Yet, how could the leaders and the people enjoy purity, when the gates of the Lord's house were closed?
How could they prosper, when they do not enjoy the joy of the Spirit?
The king, therefore, put the foundation of his program: the holy pure worship.

- + In the first year, he opened the gates of the house of the Lord;
He gathered together the priests and the Levites to kindle their hearts by the love of purity;
He sought from each of hem to start by himself
For, unless each one purifies himself, how could he care for the sanctity of the house of the Lord?

And unless he cares for the sanctity of the house of the Lord, how could the people be sanctified?

King Hezekiah, therefore, kindled their hearts with the zeal to sanctify their own life;

All were sanctified, and became a holy congregation.

+ The holy congregation set forth to cleanse the house of the Lord;
They threw out all the defilement from the sanctuary;
They removed all the idols, and all their traces from the house of the Lord;
The tears of Hezekiah's heart poured before the throne of God.

+ They were tears of joy;
For God granted him the grace of cleansing the defilement;
From the hearts of the priests and the Levites, and from the house of the Lord;

They were besides, tears of sorrow over his own fathers;
Those who persisted on closing the house of the Lord;
For they could not endure the fellowship with the Heavenly One

+ They broke the covenant between God and His people;
They put off the lamps; for they loved the darkness and not the light;
They became slaves of the devil, the prince of the kingdom of darkness;
They rejected the sonhood to God, the Grantor of light;
Who shines over those who sit in the darkness;
Tears crawled in; as it was time to burn incense;
He saw how heaven exulted by the incense of prayers;
Instead of the abhorrent smell of arrogance, uncleanness, and corruption.

+ How did the king feel, as the priests offered the sacrifices?
For the priests, the Levites, the leaders, and all the people;
Seeing Your sacrifice on the cross through the animal sacrifices;

His soul exulted, and his heart danced as though with the heavenly creatures,

+ Now, as the house of the Lord was sanctified;
What came in the king's mind?
He thought back about what his fathers have done;
He saw them anxious, disturbed, and with inner bitterness;
He saw the gloating nations jeer with ridicule;
Behold, the people now are in joy, exultation, and conquest;
He saw how, in the time of his fathers, hundred of thousands of leaders and soldiers fell by the sword of the enemy;
He saw how the devil shackled them with the chains of sin;
And drew them in humiliation, reproach, and disgrace to hell;

+ Behold, Jerusalem turned into a joyful celebration;
Many sacrifices were offered for the sins of all;
Behold, the Levites played music and praise;
They became like members of a heavenly choir;
Behold, the priests sound the silver trumpets;
Calling all to listen to the voice of the Lord.
To receive His commandments as jewels to adorn themselves;
And to pour on their souls exalted beauty.

+ Together with Hezekiah, grant me, O Lord, to be sanctified by Your Holy Spirit;
And to sanctify my senses, emotions, and all my energies;
To turn my depths into a holy house for You;
To set Your dwelling place in me;
From which fragrant incense comes forth, bearing Your sweet holy fragrance;
In It, plant Your cross that destroys the powers of the devil;

Turn my inner man into a choir that never ceases to praise You.



CHAPTER 30

HEZEKIAH CALLS THE TWO KINGDOMS TO COME TO JERUSALEM TO CELEBRATE THE FEASTS OF PASSOVER AND THE UNLEAVENED BREAD

Since the days of Solomon the son of David, the people did not experience the true joy of celebrating the holy feasts (26). Despite the seemingly very difficult circumstances, the long duration of being denied of the holy feasts, and the division of the people into two kingdoms, Hezekiah believed that there is nothing difficult for God of the impossible; and he intended to celebrate the Passover in an unprecedented way.

Indeed, many of the people had no experience of the rites of this Feast, but God proclaimed His grace and mercy (6-9). His compassion, longsuffering, and longing for the salvation of all, if possible, was shown in not committing the priests, who did not sanctify themselves, out of ignorance and lack of experience, and not of slothfulness and negligence, to the letter of the law; and in allowing the extension of the period of joy.(26).

In this chapter we see Hezekiah, king of Judah call the two kingdoms to come to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover.

- 1- Hezekiah calls the two kingdoms to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover

2- Hezekiah postpones the celebration of the Feast of Passover to the second month of the year 2 - 5

3- Hezekiah exhorts all to celebrate the Feast
6 - 12

4- The celebration of the Feast of Passover
13 – 27

1- HEZEKIAH CALLS THE TWO KINGDOMS TO COME TO JERUSALEM TO CELEBRATE THE FEAST OF PASSOVER:

“And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel” (1)

As Hezekiah's own father made war against the northern kingdom, in which many have fallen dead and captivated by Israel; all expected that Hezekiah would tend to take revenge against Israel. But his heart, flaring with the love of God, and his longing to re-open the gates of the house of God in Jerusalem, and removing the idol-worship, motivated him after having the house of the Lord cleansed, to call the children of the Northern kingdom to come over to worship the living God. How great and amazing spirit of love toward God and the brethren! He also sent messages to Ephraim and Manasseh, on account of that they were the nearest tribes of the north to Judah.

It so seems that the king of Israel at that time was Hoshea the son of Elah one of the best of their kings, who received Hezekiah's call with tolerance, contrary to the precedent kings who persisted on forbidding the people to ascend to Jerusalem.

2- HEZEKIAH POSTPONES THE CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF PASSOVER TO THE SECOND MONTH OF THE YEAR:

“For the king, his leaders and all the congregation had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month” (2)

Having sat on the throne of Judah, and finding how the house of the Lord was full of the abominations of idol-worship, Hezekiah did not hasten to celebrate the Feast of Passover, on its fixed date in the first month, but sought the counsel of the leaders and all the congregation in Jerusalem to postpone the celebration to the second month after finishing the cleansing of the house of the Lord, and the sanctification of the priests. He did not tend to celebrate it in the first month of the next year after he sat on the throne, in compliance to the law, lest the hearts of the people would probably cool off. In taking this decision, Hezekiah depended upon a text in the law that allows the one impure to celebrate the Passover the second month of the same year (Numbers 9: 1-13).

In that, king Hezekiah got ahead of his time. Although he was very particulate to keep the divine commandment, and to obey the statutes of the law, yet he was not literal in their execution. To choose the date of celebrating the Feast of Passover, he had three alternatives before him:

- a- To follow the law literally; which necessitated two things: the sanctification of the temple, the priests, and the Levites from all traces of the idol-worship and their abominations that crawled into them along the years of darkness; and to postpone the celebration of the Feast to the first month of the next year; which would probably cool off the zeal of some. Hence this alternative was rejected by the king
- b- The second alternative was to celebrate the Feast in its fixed date in the first year; without the sanctification of the temple, the priests, and the Levites; which implies breaking an essential commandment; namely the commitment to sanctification and purity; an unacceptable view; for the Holy One would never disregard the sanctity and purity.

- c- The third alternative, that required a heart walking by the Spirit, was to postpone the celebration of the Feast to the second month of the same year; which although not according to the literality of the law, but not to its spirit; on account of that it is not because of slothful or negligence, but in accordance of zeal on the fulfillment of the sanctification. That was the alternative chosen by king Hezekiah. Besides, this postponement for one month would give enough time to call all those in the Northern kingdom to partake of the celebration.

- + The Jews were like children under the supervision of a teacher. The law was the teacher, who brings us forth to the Master, namely to the Lord Christ. We may fear the teacher; but the Master leads us to the way of salvation. Fear would bring us forth to freedom; freedom to faith; faith to love; love to sonhood; and sonhood to inheritance. Hence, wherever there is faith there is freedom; for the servant works by fear, while the free by faith.... The former under the letter, and the later under the grace;... the former in bondage, and the later in the Spirit. Wherever the Spirit of God is, there will be freedom.

- + The Lord Jesus came, bringing forth the new covenant; and what was previously done has become old. ... The Christians are renewed, and the Jews grew old; ... the grace is renewed, and the letter grew old. The mountains of the concept according to the letter were displaced, moved, and destroyed; and replaced by the perception according to the Spirit. Hence the understanding of the law according to the flesh, passed on, and the law came to be spiritual; according to the words of the apostle, saying: *"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin"* (Romans 7: 14). But he, himself, who was carnal became spiritual, and proclaims: *"I think, I also have the Spirit of God"* (1 Corinthians 7: 40). Jesus made those mountain grow old, which the Jews did not know; For,

indeed, if they did know, they would have not crucified the Lord of glory; and would have not persisted on following the Jewish nonsense.

(St. Ambrose)

Commenting on the words “*You have dove’s eyes*” (Song 1: 15), the scholar Origen says:

- + Surely, likening her eyes to those of a dove, refers to her understanding the divine Scripture, not according to the letter, but to the Spirit, and to her perception of its spiritual secrets. For the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3: 16). The understanding of the law and the prophets in the spiritual sense is realized if we have the eyes of a dove ... Such a soul longs to have the wings of a dove (Psalm 68: 14), to become able to fly high in her understanding of the spiritual secrets; and to dwell in the courts of wisdom.
- + “*The kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17: 21) ... for the sake of forsaking the letter to the life-giving Spirit. As man returns to the Lord, the veil is removed. From over his face
- + Whoever interprets the law according to the body, namely to the letter, would never come to Christ, who is Life.

(The scholar Origen)

- + You, O Jews, have received the law, and intend to observe it, yet you are unable to do so... Long to Christ; Confess to Him; Believe in Him, Add the Spirit to the letter, for then you will be saved. For “*the letter kills*”; and if it does, where will hope be? “*But the Spirit gives life*” (2 Corinthians 3: 6)

(St. Augustine)

“For they could not keep it at that time, because a sufficient number of priests had not sanctified themselves, nor that the people gathered together at Jerusalem” (3)

The postponement of the celebration of the Feast for a month gave Hezekiah the chance to call all Israel, including the remnant remaining in the Northern kingdom after the devastation done by the Assyrians to the kingdom, six or seven years before. Such a call, directed to the Northern kingdom, although well received by a multitude of individuals, had been rejected before by the major tribes,. Now after two centuries, we see pilgrims coming from the mountain to Jerusalem. The unity between Galilee and Judah is realized by the effort of king Hezekiah. Now, the Galileans are coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover, after suffering the bitterness of the dissension that lasted over two centuries of time. Being well received by the men of Judah, Hezekiah is qualified to bear the feature and name of David. One of Hezekiah’s wives was from Galilee, so was his daughter-in-law (2 kings 23: 36; 21: 19).

Some of the Galileans used to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast, even in the days of the Lord Christ (Luke 2: 41-42; John 7: 9-10); and it was easy to recognize them by their distinct accent, as it happened to Peter (Mark 14: 70), and some other disciples (Acts 2: 7).

“And the matter pleased the king and the congregation” (4)

“So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel from Beersheba to Dan that they should come to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner” (5)

“since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner”;

According to some, this means that the Jews in the Northern kingdom did not observe the Feast of Passover as prescribed by the law; on account of that their kings did not allow them to go to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate it.

3- HEZEKIAH EXHORTS ALL TO CELEBRATE THE FEAST:

“Then the runners went out throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the commandment of the king ‘Children of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, then He will return to the remnant of you who had escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria’ (6)

“The runners”; were messengers who could move very quickly, were trusted by the sender, and were usually members of the royal guards.

It is obvious that this message was sent after the Assyrian captivity of Israel.

“And do not be like your fathers and your brethren who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to astonishment as you see” (7)

“Now do not be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord, and enter His sanctuary, which He had sanctified forever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you” (8)

“For if you return to the Lord your brethren and your children will be treated by compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land, for the Lord

God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him” (9)

A magnificent portrait of the bond between the repentance and the love of the brethren; as, once man returns to God, he will not be the only one to enjoy the mercy, compassion, and the look of the Lord upon him, but, together with him, his brothers and children will enjoy them. When Nehemiah rose his heart to God seeking His mercy, and confessing, in his own name, and those of his fathers, their sins, all the people enjoyed the divine mercy. So we do not marvel if the believer lifts his heart up seeking from the Lord to grant him the repentance, saying: *“Lead me away; we will run after you; ... We will be glad and rejoice in you”* (Song 1: 4). He says *“Lead **me** away”*, in the singular tense; then says: *“**We** will run after you; **We** will be glad and rejoice in you”* in the pleural tense.. When the believer lifts his heart up to God, he draws together with him the hearts of many to enjoy fellowship with God.

This is the secret and activity of the cross; it bears the power of testimony and attraction; and the secret of joy and gladness; as my soul will enjoy You, O Lord, You will be in me; and I will be in You; that people will recognize You through me, and seek You. Then our hearts will be filled with joy and gladness; even the heavenly creatures will rejoice with us.

When Zacchaeus the chief tax-collector was attracted to follow the Lord Christ, he gathered together the tax collectors and the sinners to rejoice encountering the Lord. And when the Samaritan woman sat with the Lord, she called all the inhabitants of her city to sit with Him and to enjoy His active talk.

That is the secret of the church ... the attractive power of the cross; ... for if the church happens to forget the cross, and cares for the ways of the world, she will not be able to run ahead of the world in what concern it. She can overcome the world by the love working in the life of her children. By the cross alone, souls may be drawn to the church through repentance. The seductive ways of the

world, on the other hand, will destroy the portrait of the church, even in the sight of the world itself.

“God will not turn His face from you”; The Holy Book with its two testaments, often reveals the longing of God to be present in us and in our midst, and His desire to looking at us, to let us discover in His eyes, His love, compassion, mercy, and care.

The Lord often repeats his words: **“I am with you”**; *“I am with you to save you and to deliver you from the hand of (the king of Babylon”* (Jeremiah 42: 11); *“I am with you, says the Lord”* (Haggai 1: 13).

- + Having put upon their shoulders such a great task, ... He said to His disciples: *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28: 20).. As though he says to them: [Do not say that the mission entrusted to you is a difficult one; For it is I who will do everything. He did not say that He intends to be with them alone, but with all the believers who will come after them, for the apostles will not live to the end of the age; but He speaks to all those who will believe in Him as one body.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Although He ascended in body to heaven, yet He would never deny His greatness to the world. No angel, nor an archangel can forgive sin; but only the lord Himself, who, alone can say: **“I am with you”**. Yet, if someone sins, he will not be forgiven unless he repents.

(St. Ambrose)

“So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them” (10)

The runners did not reach Dan and Naphtali because they have fallen into the hand of Assyria.

“They laughed”; for they could not believe that God can save them; after falling under the siege of Assyria, then were captivated after two or three years.

“Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun, humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem” (11)

In every generation and everywhere you will find a few who are ready to return to God. Five of the ten tribes sent representatives (11; 18): Asher, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun..

Two tribes: Reuben and Gad were in captivity. One tribe: Dan joined Judah. Two tribes: Simeon and Naphtali remained, who were more than regular idol-worshippers.

“And the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to do the commandment of the king and the leaders, at the word of the Lord” (12)

The runners passed from one city to another in the northern kingdom. Their call was met by some with rejection, scorn, and mocking; and by others with the a spirit of humility. who came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast together with their brethren.

4- THE CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF PASSOVER:

“Now many people, a very great congregation assembled at Jerusalem to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month”
(13)

“They arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and they took away all the incense altars and cast them in the brook of Kidron”
(14)

It is obvious that the existence of pagan altars in Jerusalem up to that time reveals that king Hezekiah started by the positive aspect concerning reestablishing the worship of the living God in the temple of the Lord; and left those altars and all their annexes to another step.

“Then they slaughtered the Passover lambs on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought the burnt offerings to the house of the Lord” (15)

Here he talks about the priests and the Levites who were slothful to sanctify themselves to get rid of the traces of pagan worship, because of their lack of zeal to return to the worship of the living God. Those, seeing the zeal and seriousness of the people, they shamefully had their hearts kindled as well, got sanctified, and offered the sacrifices to the Lord. Yes indeed, it is the role of the priests and the Levites to lead the people, to teach and support them to enjoy salvation; but the godly among the regular people, by their holy zeal, oftentimes will kindle the hearts of the priests and the Levites with zeal.

It is befitting of the priest as well as of every believer not to cease longing for the continuous learning.

It is God alone who is absolutely perfect; teaches the world, and need no learning. But we, the priests and ministers, while we minister to God dwelling in us, are committed to widen our hearts, always to seek from God; and to have the

sweet fragrance of Christ in us; for, however wide our hearts become, it is no more than a tiny drop compared to the sea of the love of God.

The shepherd – even if he is a Pope – if he is not perpetually learning, his growth will cease and will keep his flock from the spiritual growth. But the more he humbles himself at the feet of the Lord, and the more he opens his heart up to Him in prayer and study of the Holy Book; and the more he always listens to learn the judgments of God; he will grow in His fellowship, and his flock will grow together with him. Hence the apostle Paul commands his disciple bishop Timothy to the necessity of continuous reading; and the bishop commands the priest on the day of his ordination, saying: [Be enlightened by reading, keep on learning the meanings of the books of the church].

- + I cannot flee from the task of teaching, as long as priesthood is put upon my shoulders. I wish I strive to learn, to be able to teach. For there is only One Lord (God) who alone needs no learning of what He teaches to all. Men, on the other hand, have to learn before they can teach; and to receive from God, their teacher, what to teach to others.

- + Why do not you spend your time after you finish your work in the church, in reading (to learn)? ... Why do not you go back to encounter Christ? ... Why do not you talk to Him, and listen to His voice? We address Him in prayer, and listen to His voice when we read the holy inspiration of God.

(St. Ambrose)

“They stood in their place according to their custom, according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled the blood which they received from the hand of the Levites” (16)

In the 'Mishna' it came that the priests used to stand in two rows, starting from the altar to the outer court, where the people assemble. He who offers the lamb, would slaughter it and put its blood in a pot, then deliver the pot to the nearest priest, who delivers it to the next one, then the next, etc. and the last one will deliver it to the altar. While the pots with blood pass ascending from one priest to another; the empty pots are delivered by the second row of priests to descend from the altar without delay.

“From the hands of the Levites”, For many of those who offer sacrifices are not well-prepared (not sanctified); the Levites take over the slaughtering of the animals offered and deliver them to the priests.

“For there were many in the congregation who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to the Lord” (17)

We should not marvel that many came to celebrate without sanctifying themselves; as those who lived in the Northern kingdom, received from their fathers and grandfathers the pagan worship, know nothing about the law; and in ignorance they ate the Passover without sanctifying themselves. Nevertheless, they had longing to return to the Lord. That is why the Levites took over themselves to slaughter the Passover.. Hearing of that the king prayed for them, saying: *“May the Good Lord provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary” (18, 19)*; and God received his prayer for them.

“For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleanse themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But

Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'May the Good Lord provide atonement for everyone' (18)

With his wide heart, and freedom from being enslaved by the letter, king Hezekiah allowed those coming from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun to partake of the celebration of the Feast, without purifying themselves; for he had compassion on them, having come from societies which utterly submitted to idol-worship; He took into consideration that if he rejected them, they will return home broken-hearted; and in despair they might most probably resume idol-worship.

Under the shadow of the law, Hezekiah was more loving, spiritual, wide-hearted, and mature than some literals in the new covenant, without love or understanding. He firmly did not allow the priests and the Levites to start sanctifying the house of the Lord without sanctifying themselves first; nor allowed the common people to celebrate the Feast without being purified. But concerning those who came from a land prevailed by idol-worship, he opened before them the door of hope; saying: "*May the Good Lord provide atonement for everyone*" (18).

By such a Spirit, St. Ambrose wrote two messages about repentance; the first of which he addressed to the followers of 'Novatius' who rejected the repentance of those who denied faith as a result of fearing torture; or some others who committed certain un-repentable sins (according to them); a message that reveals to all of us the extent of God's unconditional love to sinners, opening the doors of hope before them without limits, and how easy is the way of repentance and the return to God. And the second message he addressed to us, sinners, to provoke us not to despise the mercies of God, and turn the hope for repentance to a chance to slothfulness and postponement. In those two messages it came:

- + They claim that we should not accept those who denied faith in the congregation again, on account of that they have defiled the sanctities, something that exempt them from gaining forgiveness. By that, they contradict the divine inspiration, and hold fast to their own teachings; for the Lord, having forgiven sins, exempted nothing of them. By so doing, they believe that they are giving greater awe to God, when,, actually, no one does God more wrong, having despised His commandments, and their job as priests to God. For, when the Lord Jesus, Himself said in the gospel: *“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them”* (John 20: 22, 23); whoever honors the Lord will obey this commandment,

About their increasing haughtiness, I should say to them: [Their will contradicts the Spirit of the Lord who inclines to mercy and not to cruelty ... They do what He does not desire; For, although He is the just Judge, and it is His right to punish, yet we find that, with His mercy He forgives].

They say that with the exception of the major sins, absolution may be given to the minor ones... God did not do any discernment, but promised to give His mercies to all; granted His priests the authority to absolve all sins with no exception ... What vanity that is? To claim for yourselves the kinds of sins which you could absolve of sin; leaving to the Lord the sins that could not be absolved; by which they refer mercy to themselves, and cruelty to the Lord.

We should know that God is the God of mercy, who is inclined toward forgiveness more than toward cruelty; hence He said on the tongue of His prophet: *“I desire mercy and not sacrifice”* (Hosea 6: 6). How can God receive your offerings, you who deny mercy; when it is said, *“I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies; says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live”* (Ezekiel 18: 32). Interpreting this fact, the apostle says: *“For what*

the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin; He condemned sin in the flesh”; that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who so not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8: 3, 4).

The prophet David says: *“Will God cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? ... Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” (Psalm 77: 7-9).* This is how the prophet proclaim; while those people persist upon denying the mercies of God.

(St. Ambrose)

“who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary” (19)

‘And the Lord listened to Hezekiah and healed the people” (20)

Hezekiah was criticized by no one, because he brought forth people who ate the Passover while unclean; for they never celebrated the Passover Feast before, had no knowledge of its rites, never were in Jerusalem, and never celebrated feasts since two centuries; On the contrary, God received his prayer for them.

“So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing to the Lord, accompanied by loud instruments” (21)

“And Hezekiah gave encouragement to the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the Lord; and they ate throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers” (22)”

Here, Hezekiah's personality appears to bear the feature of the loving spiritual leader; as it is said: *“And Hezekiah gave encouragement to the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the Lord”* (22). For in those circumstances, he, as a spiritual leader, did not care to criticize or to give orders; but, feeling how exhausted the priests and the Levites were, who were as though hewing rocks, because of what dwelt upon the temple and the people along the eras of the wicked kings; he used the way of encouragement, seeing them as wise teachers of the good knowledge of God to the people.

It is befitting of the Christian, wherever and however he may be, to encourage and support, according to the words of the apostle: *“We exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all”* (1Thessalonians 5: 14)

Of the main issues of keeping the Feast is to eat unleavened bread; which the Levites kept by offering daily praises together with peace offerings.

“And the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness” (23)

After consulting the leaders, and seeing the amazing joy with which the multitudes, whether those coming from the north or from Judah, celebrated the Feast of Passover, a new experience they did not know nor lived before, all along the generations, the king decided to extend the celebration seven more days; to the great joy of the priests and the people in the Lord.

“For Hezekiah king of Judah gave to the congregation a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep, and the leaders gave to the congregation a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep;

and a great number of priests sanctified themselves “(24)

“The whole congregation rejoiced and the priests and the Levites, all the congregation that came from Israel, the sojourners who came from the land of Israel, and those who dwelt in Judah” (25)

“the sojourners”, were the pagans who converted to Judaism were circumcised, and lived among the people; for it was not allowed to eat the Passover without being circumcised.

The celebration of the symbolic Passover in the old covenant , so filled all with joy: the king, the leaders, the priests, the Levites, the people of Judah, those who came over from the tribes of the north, and even the sojourners who received faith; that it was decided to extend the Feast seven more days. If we ask those who partook of that celebration about their feelings, they would say that they desire to extend the Feast for their whole life long. What would we say concerning the celebration of the true Passover; in which our Lord Jesus Christ so loved us to deliver Himself to crucifixion and death for our sake; being the lamb of God who bears the sin of the world, and resurrected to raise us together with Him?

...

Yes indeed, the Passover of the true lamb turns the life of His believers into an unceasing Feast. In the following are quick quotes about the Passover of the Lord Christ, that brings joy to the hearts, as recorded by St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi:

- + The prophet Isaiah cried out, saying to Jerusalem: *“Awake, awake, put on strength”* (Isaiah 51: 9). And Zechariah cried out loudly, saying: *“Rejoice*

greatly, O daughter of Zion; Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you” (Zechariah 9: 9).

The little children cried out, saying, “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 21: 9).*

Yet, the Hebrew nation did not heed the voices of Isaiah, nor of Zechariah..

They did not listen to the prophets, nor to the children, but were angry to hear their songs.

Through their arrogance they searched for some way to keep them silent; But those who sang praise did not keep silent, for the obvious truth moved them to keep on singing praise;

It was high time to praise the Son; for if they denied Him that, the solid rocks will do it;

The king of kings sat on a colt, and nature moved to praise Him on His humility.

It was befitting of the priests, the scribes, and the rulers of the people to utter the convenient praise;

When the elders denied the praise that was due, the children were stirred up to shout their praise;

And even if the later kept silent, the praise goes on by the rocks that shake;

Nature strives to praise its Lord; If those who can talk keep silent, the mute will talk.;

And if the learned keep silent, the simple will talk; and if all keep silent, the rocks will be ready to sing praise.

It was not possible then for praise to cease, either by men or rocks;

Marveling at the humility of the Son of God, nature cared to praise Him with a loud voice;

+ In Your great day, in which all creation rejoice, allow me to talk profusely about Your resurrection;

The Feast that brought gladness to all angels and disciples, brought it to me to praise You;

O Mighty God, who was raised from the tomb with splendor; by you I talk about Your amazing conquest;

In Your great Feast, heaven and earth are exultant; for in it, both, after animosity they reconciled together.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem” (26)

Namely since the dedication of the temple with joy in the era of Solomon, the Feast in the days of Hezekiah was equivalent to that of Solomon in its duration and the multitudes who partook in it. But after the dissension of ten tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam, the great majority of the people of those tribes have never practiced the worship in the temple of Solomon, nor partook of the Feasts.

“Then the priests arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven” (27)

The gates of heaven opened up exultant in that people gathering together; and listened to the priests bless the people. The purity of the king reflected on the Levite priests and on the multitudes of partakers, God received their worship, and poured the spirit of joy and exultation in their hearts. Together with the smoke of their sacrifices, their prayers, supplications, thanksgiving, and praise ascended to heaven together with the blessing from the heart by the priests on the

congregation. In the 'Tergom' it came, [Their prayers ascended to the dwelling place of the holy 'Shakinah' in heaven.

That celebration showed, not only God's love for people, but the love of the brethren for one another in the Lord. The psalmist says in the one before the last of the psalms of ascent: "*How good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psalm 133: 1)

+ In the house of God, the church of Christ, men dwell together with one mind, in simple harmony.

(St. Cyprian)

+ Love is the gate through which we enter into heaven itself

+ There are many good things, but some of them may lack the beauty of gladness. And there are many things that grant satiety, but may lack goodness. It may be difficult for two to exist together, ... Notice that he did not refer to people dwelling together in one place, but dwelling together in unity; namely in harmony and love, which make them by one spirit.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ "*How lovely is Your tabernacle; O Lord of hosts*" (Psalm 84: 1) for those are then the storehouses where the spiritual wheat abound. "*Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, that they may receive you into everlasting habitations*" (See Luke 16: 9); ... "*How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts*"; for through them, man turns his residence from earth to heaven.

(St. Jerome)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 30

LET THE HEARTS OF YOUR PEOPLE REJOICE IN YOU

- + Glory be to You, O God who makes the hearts of Your people rejoice in You;
Grant me what You did to king Hezekiah;
That my heart would be preoccupied with the sanctity of Your people and Your church;
And that my soul would exult in Your pleasure on us, priests and people.

- + Hezekiah's pleasure was to bring joy to all believers;
To sanctify them by You, to let You dwell among them, and to carry them to You;
His heart opened to all the tribes, as much as is possible;
He sought from all to partake together of the worship of God;
And to exult in God who dwells in the midst of the loving hearts.

- + Grant me, O Lord, a heart wide enough to accommodate all;
And the spiritual mind that is not enslaved to the deadly letter;
Grant me to rejoice in the salvation of all humanity;
When will all men turn into angels?
When will the whole earth turn into an icon of heaven"

- + Let my heart turn into a perpetual Feast by the power of Your cross;
You have delivered Yourself a Passover for the whole humanity;
To proclaim Your love to the whole world, and to bring joy to all men;
You are our Feast, joy, and holy exultation.

- + By Your cross, liberate the whole world from the bondage of sin;
Pour Your righteousness upon every believer;
Carry every believer to Your heavens;
To make him experience the exultant heavenly life;
And to join the choir of the high hosts.

- + In the love of king Hezekiah for his people;
He sought the counsel of the leaders to extend the Feast for an extra
week;
We, as well, seek from You, through Your cross and resurrection,
To extend Your glorious day of Your resurrection all the journey of our life;
To make the whole world enjoy the joy of Your glorious Passover;
And to let all say, together with the apostle Paul:
*“He raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly
places, in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2: 6).



CHAPTER 31

CARE FOR THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

After all, the king, the rulers of the people, the priests, the Levites, and the people, tasted that celebration that brought pleasure to heaven in the holy dwelling of God, all set forth to the cities of Judah, putting in their hearts not to turn back to idol-worship. The opening of the gates of the house of the Lord, cleansing the temple, and the celebration of the Feast of Passover, together with a multitude from the Northern kingdom, have brought forth a desire for a closer relationship with God.

The life of king Hezekiah could be considered a living portrait, and a practical program of the life of the minister from many aspects. Hezekiah, that godly man, could not endure what his father has done, he who corrupted the nation, the royal palace, and the temple of the Lord. At the same time, he did not start by the negative aspect, namely breaking down the idols and all their abominations, but hastened first to sanctify the temple, and to start worshipping the living God; which enflamed the hearts of the people to break the idols. He believed that whoever experience the sweetness of the true worship, would never endure the abominations of idol-worship. By that all became together; the people in particular, with their complete free will, took the evil away. It is therefore, befitting of us to do good and take way evil through the exalted grace of God.

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|---|--------|
| 1- The destruction of the traces of idol-worship in the two kingdoms | 1 |
| 2- Hezekiah cares to organize the divisions of the priests | 2 |
| 3- Hezekiah cares to sustain the priests and their families: | 3 - 21 |
| a- The king offers a grant to support the ministry in the temple | 3 |
| b- Hezekiah exhorts the people to increase the portion of the priests | 4 |
| c- The generosity of the people | 5 - 10 |

- d- Hezekiah appoints officers to distribute what was collected 11 - 19
- e- The king's heart enflamed to work 20 –
21

1- THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TRACES OF IDOL-WORSHIP IN THE TWO KINGDOM:

It was not possible to destroy the idol-worship before opening and cleansing the temple, and resuming the true worship (1-4). We cannot destroy evil, unless we start by practically holding fast to the evangelical truth.

We should not forget that the people *“arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and they took away all the incense altars and cast them into the Brook Kidron”* (30: 14), before the celebration of the Feast of Passover; For there is no fellowship between the truth and vanity; nor the celebration of the Passover when God dwells in the congregation, with any presence of elements foreign from God.

*“Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke the sacred pillars in pieces, cut down the wooden images, and threw down the
high places and the altars – from all Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh –until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned to their own cities,
every man to his possession”* (1)

After cleansing the city of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30: 14); there was a commitment to cleanse the rest of the land. Hezekiah issued a decree to create a collective public movement, to go forth to the high places, where many pagan altars were set, for worshipping the Baal in particular, to cleanse them. This was done by the people in Judah and Benjamin in the South; and Ephraim and Manasseh were cleansed as well, which was made possible by the

weakness of the Northern kingdom. The destruction of idol-worship was not only through a decree by Hezekiah, but as a response by the people to the king's faithfulness.

It was a joyful portrait to see some of the remnants in the kingdom of Israel that was destroyed by the Assyrians, get together with the kingdom of Judah around the temple, worship together, and long for returning to the holy life that previously prevailed in all Israel before the dissension, in the days of the prophet David and Solomon the Sage.

Obviously it was a fruit of the godly wise behavior of king Hezekiah, that those returning to their cities in Judah removed everything concerning the idol-worship.

When the celebration came to an end, those who partook of it, did not feel that they did the duty they were committed to do, but their hearts were more enflamed to live with God; And on another aspect, according to some, those who came from the Northern kingdom, even though it has lost its independence and submitted to the Assyrian empire, yet, being an extremely fertile and rich land, when they came to Jerusalem. they offered gifts to the temple, and spent money during their stay, creating some kind of flourish to the economy of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; that is beside the blessing of the Lord of all for assembling together with the spirit of love and unity. According to scholars of Archeology, this progress led to the extension of the city of Jerusalem to double or even to triple its original area, after adding another hill, having become a center for the refugees from the North.. And this flourishing also helped Hezekiah to fortify other cities and strengthening the army.

Yes, the king did his best to remove all traces of idol-worship (2 kings 18: 4); but on account of that the common people could discover the locations that embraced anything concerning it, which the men of Hezekiah could not see, the people went out directly after the end of the celebration to destroy them, they did not waste one single day. ... That is how it is befitting of the believer, who tastes the sweetness of the fellowship with God, and whose depths exult in Him, to hasten to cut off every bond with sin, and forsake everything that may provoke God to anger

They did that not only in the cities of Judah and Benjamin, but also in Ephraim and Manasseh. While according to some he means those cities within the reign of the king of Judah, according to others the king of Israel did not stand in the way of those who went to Jerusalem to partake of the celebration of the Passover, to go break down every trace of idol-worship in his possession.

So the enjoyment of man of the sweetness of fellowship with God may extend to the life of others; not by force, but through the true brotherly love.. They did not go back home before they consummated this task, despite their long delay, and that those events happened strongly and all of a sudden (Isaiah 2: 20; 31: 6-7). It is befitting of us to follow the lead of king Hezekiah, not to leave any trace of the foreign gods in our hearts, For what was written about the idols touch our life, according to the scholar Origen in his sermons on the book of the Judges.

+ That generation *“did evil in the sight of the Lord; they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, and served the Baals”* (Judges 2: 11-12). I wish we could see whether these things were written for them, or *“were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come”* (1 Corinthians 10: 11)..To see those things interpreted, not by me, but by the apostle, listen to what he himself says: *“What the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying: ‘Lord! They have killed Your prophets, and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life’. But what does the divine response say to him: ‘I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal’”* (1 Kings 19; Romans 11: 2-4). To this the apostle added: *“Even so then, at the present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace”* (Roman 11: 5).

This may show that the non-believers and the non-godly who lived in the time of the Savior, have served the Baal and worshipped the idols; whereas the believers and those who did the works of faith *“did not serve the Baal”*. ... As it was not written in history, in the gospel, or in any of the holy Scripture, that anyone in the era of the Savior has worshipped the Baal, or bowed his knee to idol, it must, therefore, refer to those

bound and chained by their personal sins. It is sure that when we commit sin, and when “*we are brought into captivity to the law of sin*” (Romans 7: 23), we would be worshipping the Baal. . But we are not called to that, we have not believed to be on good terms with such things, to serve sin again, and to worship the devil; but rather bow down in the name of Jesus, “*At whose name every knee should bow, of those in heaven and those on earth, and of those under the earth*” (Philippians 2: 10);

But what would I benefit when I bow the knees of my body in prayer to God, while I bow the knees of my heart to the devil? (Ephesians 6: 11).

If I do not stand fast before anger, I am bowing my knees to anger.

And if I do not stand fast to resist the evil desire, I am bowing my knees to them.

In all things that are against God, if I do not stand fast, I may look like those who served the Baal, and forsook the Lord God of their fathers who brought them out of the land of Egypt (Judges 2: 11-12; Exodus 12: 42),

In short this is what God seeks from man before and above anything else, in His commandment, saying: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might*” (Deuteronomy 6: 5); It is His wish to reign upon all the human emotions; and to know that man loves with all his heart, soul, and might, no one but the Lord his God.

(The scholar Origen)

2- HEZEKIAH CARES TO ORGANIZE THE DIVISIONS OF THE PRIESTS:

“And Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites according to their divisions, each man according to his service, the priests and the Levites for burnt offerings and peace offerings, to serve, to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the camp of the Lord” (2)

Hezekiah did not appoint the divisions of the priests and the Levites, according to his own mind, nor set a new system, but he committed himself to the systems put by king David through an inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The early fathers of the church cared, as well, to set a priesthood system for worship and preaching, according to what came in the Holy Book, and was practiced by the apostles. The apostle Paul presented to us a spiritual portrait of the clerical order of the priests, the conditions to elect them, their responsibilities, the spiritual in particular, their relationship with one another, and with the congregation; beside their own rights.

“in the gates of the camp of the Lord”, According to some, ‘camp’ here refers to the location where God encounters His people. In the wilderness it meant where the tribes surrounded the tabernacle of meeting; and after the temple was built, it came to mean the temple with its outer court where the congregation assembled together around the temple.

What Hezekiah did concerning organizing the house of the Lord reveal to us our commitment to do in the temple of the Lord about which the apostle says: *“The temple of God is holy, which temple you are”* (1 Corinthians 3: 17):

- a- To take away from our hearts all the foreign gods, by the work of the Holy Spirit.
- b- To work in order and according to a system. The way Hezekiah appointed the priests and the Levites according to their divisions, every one according to his role; it is befitting of the believer, through his humble spirit of leadership to use all his talents, senses, and energies in him to the account of the glory of God.
- c- To offer the burnt offerings of love on the altar set in his soul.
- d- To offer the peace offerings and the thanksgiving offerings on God’s gifts.
- e- To practice praise and the enjoyment of the experience of the heavenly joy.
- f- To cherish the divine presence, when the inner man turns into a dwelling place for the Lord, with holy gates.

2- HEZEKIAH CARES TO SUSTAIN THE PRIESTS AND THEIR FAMILIES:

a- The king offers a grant to support the ministry:

“The king also appointed a portion of his possessions for the burnt offerings; for the morning and evening burnt offerings, the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths and the new moons and the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the Lord” (3)

The king readily offered a portion of the income of his kingdom to spend upon the temple and worship, so as not to burden the people, But we can say that it was David who has set the commitment of the king to spend, from his personal account on the morning and the evenings burnt offerings, and some of the other sacrifices.

There were simple offerings presented equally by the rich and the poor, so that no one would boast that he is better than others, or feel lowly that he is less; For all to know that there is no partiality with God, but all men are equal in His sight.

And there are other offerings by believers according to their possibilities, to make them perceive that what they possess is nothing but a gift from God; so that the rich would offer much to be spent on the ministers of the temple, and to support the poor and the needy.

As it is written in the law of the Lord”; Being only preoccupied by the divine law and statutes, Hezekiah in his practical life was obedient to God, and that was the secret of his prosperity..

b- Hezekiah exhorts the people to increase the portion of the priests: . .

“Moreover he commanded the people who dwelt in Jerusalem to contribute support for the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the law of the Lord” (4)

King Hezekiah issued a decree to the inhabitants of Jerusalem first, to give and to be a role model to the other cities of Judah, to give a portion to the priests and the Levites according to what came in the law, a commandment that was long neglected, and led to negligence in the service of the temple. In short the generosity of the king stirred up this spirit in the people; beside the sweetness of the celebration of the Feast of Passover that made them generous to support the ministry in the temple.

Hezekiah's heart was not preoccupied with the organization in itself, nor to giving a portion to the priests and the Levites to dedicate themselves only to their spiritual work, and not to be confused with any other material commitments; but was more preoccupied with “*holding fast to the law of God*”, perceived by the king to be the main issue in the life of believers, to enjoy the fellowship with Him.

According to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, God's commandments are the jewels by which the church bride is adorned, to bear, by the Holy Spirit of God the icon of her heavenly Groom.

+ Your divine secret is a treasure hidden between the lines; Grant me, O Son of God the prudence to discover it.

What the Holy Scriptures contain of Your inspiration are precious jewels ;
Make me worthy to collect them;

The Word of Life is a jewel to whoever loves it. Come, O listener, hang it in your ear, and adorn yourself with it.

It is more precious than gold;

For the temporal jewels are valueless and mortal; whereas the Word of Life is the eternal adornment of the soul;

While the jewel adorn a single man, the Word of Life adorns tens of thousand of men listening to them.

It grants light to the souls living in darkness.

By it the poor becomes richer than kings, like a sunny day.

+ Let whoever intends to gain himself, read and have benefit from those treasures, hidden for him in the Holy Scripture

+ The Holy Scripture is an ocean; where we find in it the hidden pearl;
The interpreter is committed to dive to find it; and to show it to the traders;
His mind should dive in the Torat, to take hold of the divine pearl;
His tongue should introduce it to the listeners, saying: [By your minds, hang the daughter of light as an adornment].

+ All the words of the Holy Scripture are full of light, by which I am enlightened to tell Your amazing news;

The secrets are buried in the Scriptures like treasures; O Son of God, help the mind to bring them up.

O our Lord, qualify me to take from those great riches found in the divine books;

The Word of Life is a pearl for him who loves it. Approach, O listener, and hang it in your ear as an adornment;

If a regular pearl is purchased for a talent of gold, it will only adorn one ear;

But the Word of Life is better than a pearl, for it is enough to adorn thousands of ears;

The Word of Life, by its natural and exalted beauty, adorn the ears of all mankind;

You can see now that the Word of Life is far better than a pearl for him who acquires it.

The Word of Life is light, that enlightens the souls in darkness, like the day;

The Word of Life is riches, that would turn the poor man into a king;

Only by the Word of Life, man would be greater than animals; by which Adam became rich, and acquired the Creator;

By the Word, heaven and earth exist from the beginning; By His Word, God created all His marvels.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

c- The generosity of the people:

“As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and all the produce of the field; and they

brought in abundantly the tithes of everything” (5)

The unity of the people was realized in that principal Feast of Passover, which was practiced through a mutual effort against anything that may insults the Lord.

The people brought in abundance the firstfruits of the produce of the fields, and the tithes, not to fulfill the need of the priests and the ministers, but to offer sacrifices of love to God Himself.

They brought more than what is required by the law; for the statute did not mention the honey (See Leviticus 3: 11); but the people felt that they could offer firstfruits and tithes from its produce to the priests.

According To Josephus, the honey here, does not mean the bee honey, of which tithes were not required to present, but it is a produce from the dates,

+ When man approaches death, I wish a friend of his would prepares ahead the requirements for his funeral, and exhorts him to leave something of his riches for the poor; to make Christ one of his heirs.

+ He who gives a few from the few he has , is better than him who gives a plenty of the plenty; for he would be then like the widow mentioned in the gospel; The alms is not evaluated by its size, but by the will and intention of the giver; for which the Lord cares and rewards more.

(St.

John Chrysostom)

Negligence in giving will harm the ministry and the worship, as is obvious in Nehemiah 13: 10-14.

“And the children of Israel and Judah who dwelt in the cities of Judah brought the tithes of oxen and sheep; also the tithes of holy things which were consecrated to the Lord their

God they laid in heaps” (6)

“In the third month they began laying them in heaps, and they finished in the seventh month” (7)

In the third month the firstfruits are offered, for then they would start to collect the harvest. And in the seventh month, the tithes of the harvest collected are offered.

“And when Hazakiah and the leaders came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord and His people Israel” (8)

“And His people Israel”; What came upon the Northern kingdom on the hand of Assyria, have caused a kind of confusion; and difficulty to discern the tribes from one another. King Hezekiah’s heart was preoccupied with gathering all the tribes under the

name of:Israel; but, at the same time, he cared to have representatives of all the tribes; one of each tribe, with the confirmation of the unity together.

The Lord Christ chose twelve disciples, to confirm that the new covenant is an extension of the old covenant; And the foundations of the Higher Jerusalem, itself, are formed of twelve precious stones (Revelation 21: 14)

“Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps” (9)

The goal of questioning them is:

- a- To make sure that the priests and the Levites who minister in the temple have got their own portion,
- b- To make sure that what are laid in heaps actually represent the abundance left; and everyone has got what would satisfy his needs, and no one was oppressed.

“And Azariah the chief priest, from the house of Zadok, answered him and said, ‘since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat,

and have plenty left, for the Lord had blessed His people, and what is left is this abundance” (10)

If Azariah here is the same priest who confronted king Uziah when he attempted to force himself on the work of priesthood, he would have served at least for 33 years.

“The Lord had blessed His people”; It so seem that, seeing how the king was impressed at the huge quantity of the firstfruit and tithes of produce that was laid in heaps, in an exalted way, Azariah the priest, to put his heart at ease, confirmed to him that those heaps were gathered by the priests and the Levites, not through disregarding the rights of the people, but a fruit of the blessing of the Lord, that dwelt upon the people because of their return to Him.

Here the priest did not refer the abundance of the portion of the priests and the Levites, to their labor and good treatment to the people; nor referred it to the zeal of the king that motivated the people to give; but referred it in truth to the blessing of the Lord that dwelt upon the people; particularly when love prevailed among the priests and among the different categories of the people; and to the faithfulness of all from the heart.

I wish we perpetually seek the pleasure of God, and that His blessing would dwell upon the church as a whole, the way He blessed the first human family (Genesis 1: 28); and blessed the seventh day (Genesis 2: 3), and He blesses everyone who has a portion in the first resurrection; namely, who enjoys the resurrection of Christ in his daily life, while still on earth, longing to the general resurrection. Such a divine blessing is the one that works in the personal, familial, and social life, etc., in the present time, together with the enjoyment of the eternal glories in the time to come.

+ “*Husbands, love your wives*” (Ephesians 5: 25); You have been before, strangers from one another, and then were joined together by the fellowship of matrimony. Let this natural bond; this yoke put on you through the matrimonial blessing, be a link that perpetually connect you together..

+ By the Holy Spirit we have restored our dwelling place in paradise.
And our ascension to heavens.
And our return to the divine sonhood.
And our daring to call God “Our Father”.
And our fellowship in the grace of Christ.
And to be called the “children of light”; and our right in the eternal glory.
By one word, we have got the fullness of blessing in this **time** and in that to come.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + I wish our souls bless the Lord, to be blessed by the Lord.
When the Lord blesses us, we grow; and when we bless the Lord , we also grow. In both cases we are the ones to benefit (and not God). But let us first have in us the blessing of the Lord, for then, we bless Him; For this is the rain (namely His blessing), and, at the same time, the fruit; (Namely we bless Him by the Blessing He blesses us).

I wish we sing these words by fruitful worship, sound words, and true heart; for it is obvious that God the Father is called a “Vinedresser” (John 15: 10; And, according to the apostle, “*Your are God’s field; you are God’s building*” (1 Corinthians 3: 9). God the Father is a Vinedresser, plants it, and anticipates fruit from it. And the Lord Christ Himself says: “*A certain landowner planted a vineyard, ... and he leased it to vinedressers*” (Matthew 21: 33), who are committed to present the fruit in due time.

(St. Augustine)

c- King Hezekiah appoints officers to distribute what is collected:

“Now Hezekiah commanded them to prepare rooms in the house of the Lord, and they prepared them” (11)

By the rooms he means storehouses for what is brought to the house of the Lord as firstfruits and tithes.

“Then they faithfully brought in the offerings, the tithes, and the dedicated things; Cononiah the Levite was ruler over them, and Shimei his brother was the next” (12)

“Jehiel, Azariah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Josabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath,, and Benaiah, were overseer under the hand of Cononiah and Shimei his brother, at the commandment

of Hezekiah the king, and Azariah the ruler of the house of the Lord” (13)

Such care by the king to prepare rooms in some of the courts of the temple to store the offerings in an elaborate way; and to appoint treasurers and officers to put an end to any corruption or extravaganzas; would encourage the people to give generously and continually..

“Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the keeper of the East Gate was over the freewill offerings to God, to distribute the offerings of the Lord and the most holy things””(14)

He appointed Kore the son of Imnah and six assistants with him to care for the material things in the temple; namely seven persons. And after the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the upper room, the apostles chose seven disciples to care for the social work, and for the needs of the poor; to give the chance to the apostles to minister by preaching the Word (Acts6: 1-5).

The numbers have spiritual meanings:

4 refers to man created from the earth (the four corners or directions of the earth); ... 3 to the Holy Trinity; ... 12 (3X4), therefore refers to the unity of man with God in the kingdom of God on earth (3 X 4); 7 (3+4), refers to perfection; for man, the greatest among the earthly creatures, is created of dust (4); and his soul is an image of God, the Holy Trinity (3).

And there are 12 months in the year; and 7 days in the week. According to some the figure 12 refers to the divine aspect, for the foundations of the Higher Jerusalem are formed of 12 precious stones; And the figure 7 to the practical aspect (the days of the week). . In the worship, it is befitting of us to have the sound heavenly spiritual mind, together with the practical spiritual behavior in Christ Jesus.

“And under him were Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah, his faithful assistants in the cities of the priests, to distribute the allotments to their brethren

by divisions, to the great as well as to the small” (15)

In the Volgata, the Syrian, and the Septuagint versions, the word ‘Benjamin’ came as ‘Miniamin’.

“Besides these males from three years old and up who were written in the genealogy, they distributed to everyone who entered the house of the Lord his daily portion for the work

of his service, by his division” (16)

“And to the priests were written in the genealogy according to their fathers’ house, and to the Levites from twenty years old and up according to their work by the divisions” (17)

“And to all who were written in the genealogy – their little ones and their wives, their sons and daughters, the whole company of them – for in their faithfulness they sanctified

themselves in holiness” (18)

“Also for the sons of Aaron the priests who were in the fields of the commonlands of their cities, in every single city, there were men who were designated by name to distribute

portions to all the males among the priests and to all who were listed by genealogies among the Levites” (19)

d- The king’s heart is enflamed to work:

“Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah; and he did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God” (20)

The behavior of king Hezekiah reveals the truth of his person; practicing goodness, walking in uprightness, and according to the truth proclaimed to him

“And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered” (21)

This work does not concern a specific city or a group of cities, but Hezekiah did in all Judah; not to please the priests; but he was preoccupied in all his actions to do what is good before the Lord his God. So he prospered, and everyone found comfort in his work.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 31

LET ME DWELL IN YOUR HOUSE, AND ADORN ME WITH YOUR COMMANDMENTS

- + I wonder if Hezekiah’s mind was ever preoccupied with anything else but Your house!
Which he dedicated his energies and those of the priests and the Levites to cleanse of idols;
He enflamed the hearts of the leaders of Israel and the people with zeal on Your house;
He elaborately organized the worship and the ministry in Your house;
He cared to fulfill the needs of the ministers in it;
And offered much of his own portion for its expenses.

- + Grant me, O Lord, to follow the lead of Hezekiah, to care for Your house, set in my heart;
Dwell in me and sanctify my heart;
Let me dwell in Your bosoms and be sanctified by You;
You will be the only God who occupies my whole heart;

I shall not allow any other god to crawl into my heart;
I will not love wealth, evil desires, nor seek temporal honors;
Destroy every idol sitting in my heart;
I wish You transfigure in me, to reflect Your splendor on me;
Shine on me, O Sun of Righteousness;
So that sin will not find a place in me.

- + Proclaim Your presence in me, O the Heavenly High Priest;
Let my heart, my mind, and my emotions, work under Your leadership;
Let them all be crucified together with You, to offer perpetually burnt offerings of love;
To offer You peace, and thanksgiving offerings;
Your amazing grace, perpetually guard Your dwelling place in me;

- + How can I contribute to build Your sanctuary in me?
As it is the work of Your fiery Holy Spirit;
Let me offer, together with the widow the two mites of love, better than all the treasures
in the world;
Let me offer my entire age, and energies, for Your ministry;
Let me hold fast to Your holy statutes;
Let me be adorned by Your commandments;
To make my soul a bride for You.

- + Who will build in me rooms to keep the treasures of Your house?
In secret, enter into my depths;
And store the treasures of Your divine secrets;
Your gifts to me grant me riches, satiety, and perpetual joy.

- + Your dwelling in me blesses my depths;
Will fill my soul with blessings and goodness;
By Your grace, You make me a blessing;
Whenever I encounter someone, I shall desire His salvation and glory in You.

+ By Your dwelling, my heart will open wide for all men;
My love will extend to return, even to the days of Adam and Eve;
And will also extend ahead to love the generations to come;
I wish all men to be adorned with the jewels of Your Holy Spirit;
And that all will cherish Your commandments as treasures beyond evaluation;
And that the heavenly creatures will desire seeing them, as Your icon;
And that all will anticipate the day of Your coming;
To encounter You on the clouds;
And to join the choir of the heavenlies.

+ Glory be to You, who seeks to dwell in me;
And who opens Your bosoms up, to dwell together with my brethren in them.

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CHAPTER 32

BY FAITH, KING HEZEKIAH CHALLENGES ASSYRIA AND HIS ILLNESS

The spirit of power and not of failure:

The last days in king Hezekiah's life reveal to us that however great is the spirit of power we gain, we are committed to be aware lest the spirit of weakness and failure would crawl into us. Hezekiah experienced the spirit of power, when he confronted the mightiest power in that time – Assyria – that invaded and captivated many nations and peoples; and when he challenged a serious and incurable illness. But, having become slothful, and his heart was lifted up because of his conquest, of his cure from illness, and of his fame that astonished the kings and rulers around him, he fell, and subjected the kingdom of Judah to bitterness in the days of his grandchildren. The apostle Paul encourages, and warns us, saying: "*For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*" (1 Timothy 1: 7); and, "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls*" (1 Corinthians 10: 12). God has created us in His image; and when we corrupted it by disobedience, he restored it to us by His crucifixion and resurrection, to let us live by the spirit of conquest over death and the devil.

- + Whoever falls from the grace, namely the fullness of Christ, will fall empty before his enemies.

- + Meditate deeply in how you were created, and think about the Laboratory from which your nature has come out. As it is the hand of God that received you, he who is created by the Lord would not be defiled by evil, would not be corrupted by sin; and would not fall from the hand of God.

Being a vessel conformed according to a divine model by the hands of God; glorify your Creator; You were not created for any purposes other than to become a tool to glorify God. This entire universe is nothing but a book that proclaims the glory of God, to proclaim to you -- who has a mind to perceive the truth – the hidden and manifest greatness of God. Therefore carefully remember all what was said thereof.

- + Do not despair of salvation, remember what is written in the Holy Book, that “*He who falls will rise? He who turns away will return?*” (Jeremiah 8: 4); the wounded will be healed, and the prey will escape from the beast; and He who confesses his sin will not be despised; “*For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the Lord God; therefore turn and live*” (Ezekiel 18: 4). Therefore, “Do not be careless, lest you become like the wicked in the pit of evil”. It is now time to suffer long, endure, heal and reform you. Did you fall into offence? Rise up ... Did you commit sin? Cease doing it; “*Walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the path of sinners*” (Psalm 1: 1), but flee. If you become remorseful and sigh, you will be saved; for out of labor, health will emerge, and out of perspiration, salvation will come.

(St. Basil the Great)

Three temptations confront king Hezekiah:

They conform to the three temptations of the righteous ‘Job’:

- a- **He was oppressed by enemies** (Job 1: 13-21). The book of Chronicles did not care to parade the military and political achievements of Hezekiah, as it did for his salvation from the army of Assyria under the leadership of Sennacherib, which was realized through the pure prayer, capable to change any situation; for God stands on the side of the one with faithful heart. The prophet Isaiah joined Hezekiah in his prayer for the sake of salvation from the army of Sennacherib (32: 20).

- b- **He suffered from illnesses** (Job 2: 7-10)
- c- **He suffered from his own friends** (Job 2: 11-13)

The circumstances in which king Hezekiah lived:

King Hezekiah lived in a very difficult time when the Assyrian empire extended greatly, and became the source of terror to the nations surrounding Judah. Although the nations surrendered to the authority of Assyria, and showed every welcome to his armies to save themselves from his evil, yet none of them was delivered from his violence and ferocity. King of Assyria invaded the northern kingdom of Israel, and submitted it; and now, Sennacherib, his successor is invading the kingdom of Judah, to submit it to his authority.

After Hezekiah made his reforms to the temple, and the worship of the living God, the devil stirred Sennacherib up to corrupt all what Hezekiah has done. At that time, some of the nations, submitted to Assyria, started to rebel. The Philistines managed to get rid of their authority; and Edom and Judah intended to follow suit; encouraged by the Pharaoh of Egypt..

Objecting strongly against such a rebellion by Judah against Assyria; not only that he did not trust the intentions of Egypt for encouraging the nations to rebel; the prophet Isaiah, perceiving that the politics of Egypt and the Philistines was not according to the will of God; he exhorted king Hezekiah not to partake of that rebellion stirred up by Cush and Egypt (Isaiah 18-19).

According to the Assyrian, in the year 712 B.C. although Hezekiah destroyed the Assyrian altars in the promised land, yet he, at least, did not partake of the public rebellion by the Philistines .

In the year 705 B.C., when 'Sargon the second' was killed in the battle of Cimmerians, during the invasion of Asia Minor, the Assyrian empire, under the new emperor Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.), again, faced many troubles because of the rebellion on all sides against them; of which the Babylonians increased in strength until they prevailed against Assyria in the next century.

Feeling that it was high time for Judah to get its independence, Hezekiah used pressure on the Philistines to join forces with him (2 Kings 18: 8); fortified the strongholds of Jerusalem, dug an underground tube and sent delegates to Egypt to seek their help in his rebellion. The prophet Isaiah did not approve that way (Isaiah 30: 1-7), but king Hezekiah did not heed his counsel.

Sennacherib needed three years to fight against Babylon. And in the year 701 B.C. he was ready to move against the movements of rebellion in the west. He removed the king of Tyre who fled to take refuge in Cyprus, And destroyed the rebellion of the Phoenicians in the year 701 B.C., to put an end to the greatest fleet in the Mediterranean Sea at that time. ... Then King Hezekiah, was sure that Sennacherib's next step was to set forth toward Judah; which actually happened, he destroyed 46 fortified cities in Judah, and captivated their inhabitants. In those circumstances mentioned in this chapter, according to Josephus , Sennacherib, despite what Hezekiah gave him, put in his heart to put Jerusalem under siege under any circumstances.

As Sennacherib approached Jerusalem, Hezekiah counted that death was about to dwell upon him; and perceived that negotiations with Sennacherib, would entail the whole destruction of the city; the same way he previously did against the northern kingdom Israel in the year 722 B.C. He expected him to captivate the inhabitants of Judah as he did to those of Samaria. There was nothing then before Hezekiah but to strive even to death.

1- Sennecharib enters the cities of Judah	1
2- Sennecharib's purpose was to make war against Jerusalem	2 - 8
3- Sennacherib sends his servants with a message to Jerusalem	9 - 19
4- Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah pray to God	20
5- The Lord sends an angel to save Hezekiah	21 - 22
6- God healed Hezekiah from his illness	23 - 24
7- Hezekiah's heart lifted up	25 - 31
8- Hezekiah's death and burial	32 – 33

1- SENNACHERIB ENTERS THE CITIES OF JUDAH:

“After these deeds of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered Judah. He encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them over to himself” (1)

The episode of Sennacherib’s attack against Judah conform to what came In Isaiah 36 – 39, word by word. If that calamity allowed by God, happened before the consummation of the reform, the work would have stopped completely.. Hearing about what Hezekiah did, his faithfulness to God, and how he motivated the hearts of his people to destroy every trace of idol-worship, Sennacherib believed that those pagan gods would never support nor protect Hezekiah.

If the devil stirred up Sennacherib to destroy Hezekiah, and to stir up his people against him, with the assumption that God is incapable to save him from his hands; God, in His turn let him go ahead, blaspheming and challenging Him for some time, to reveal to the people His might and His protection of them in the most strong way.

2- SENNACHERIB’S PURPOSE WAS TO MAKE WAR AGAINST JERUSALEM:

“And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and his purpose was to make war against Jerusalem” (2)

According to St. Cyril the Great, Sennacherib symbolizes the devil who sends forth those under his authority to destroy the church of Christ, to stir up battle against the heroes of faith, and to ridicule the divine glory. But he says: [The divine hand, by its strength, is capable enough to save those who walk in goodness, from their enemies, and to drive them away, to liberate the holy blameless city, namely the church; against which the gates of Hades cannot prevail (Matthew 16: 18)].

“He took counsel with his leaders and commanders to stop the water from the springs which were outside the city, and they helped him” (3)

King Hezekiah wisely confronted the danger that threatened him from Assyria. Taking counsel with his leaders and commanders to stop the water from the springs which were outside the city. Brought by an underground canal, hewn in strong rocks, from the spring of Gihon to the pool of Siloam (30) it benefited the inhabitants of Jerusalem under siege. He also cared to fortify the walls of Jerusalem, and exhorted the people to believe in the salvation of the Lord. What came here in detail (2-8), did not come in the second book of the kings, nor in the writings of Josephus. It is befitting of us to notice that Hezekiah, beside trusting in the help of God, he did not disregard the necessity of doing every human effort with wisdom and experience, to defend the city, for which God supported him.

The author of the book did not care to mention the date of the attack, nor the names of the delegates of Sennacherib, nor the huge number of the Assyrians who perished, as the second book of the kings did (21).

. *“Thus many people gathered together who stopped all the springs and the brook that ran through the land, saying, ‘why should the king of Assyria come and find much water?’”*
(4)

That river was there since the old, and was deteriorated with time. Knowing that any army, however its possibilities are, would perish if denied the source of water for a number of days, Hezekiah wisely hastened to stop all the water of the springs outside the city. And diverted the water into the city through underground pipes.

“And he strengthened himself, built up the wall that was broken, raised it up to the tower, and built another wall outside; also he repaired the millo in the city of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance” (5)

Hezekiah cared to fortify the walls, built up the wall that was broken because of negligence in the days of his father Ahaz, built towers on it, and another wall outside. And he set military captains over the people.. Faithfulness in serving God does not mean slothfulness in the other

tasks. God fortifies and grants conquests to those who trust in Him, who use wisdom; and not to the negligent slothful.

“Then he set military captains over the people, gathered them together to him in the open square of the city gate, and gave them encouragement, saying” (6)

Not like his father who had no faith to strengthen him in the time of affliction, whose sins were the source of his terror, king Hezekiah gathered his captains together, and addressed them with the spirit of surety and trust in the work of God, confirming that that calamity will surely end well for the people of God.

“Be strong and Courageous, do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him” (7)

The words of the king came reflecting the experience of the people of God along the generations; as Moses defeated the Amalekites, when he stretched his hands like a cross (2 Kings 6: 16); and as Elisha told his servant ‘Gehazi: *“Do not be afraid; for there are more with us than with him”* (2 Kings 6: 16)

+ The hands of Moses directed the battle; granted the conquest and the defeat; Like a ruler, in the palms of his hands, was the rise and fall, the conquest and defeat. Whenever Moses lowers his hands, his people were defeated; and whenever he raised them, Israel prevailed; The war was between the armies; but the conquest was from Moses; The war was in the battlefields, but its activities was in the hands of the “slow in tongue” (Exodus 4: 10). The warriors did not prevail by their strength; nor the meek by their care; Those who strived did not prevail, and those who were slothful did not lose; When they fought by their strength, they did not prevail; except when Moses rose his hands up;

By seeking victory they found no help; if it was not for the power on the hill that strengthened them;

They did not prevail by the sharp swords in their hands, if not for the shadow that came down from the hill;

They did not go through the rows by their spears, and arrows, but when the son of Amram stood up on his feet;

They were not defeated by the enemy even if they remained quiet; but if Moses got a little tired, the troops would kneel down;

The power of the two parties was in vain; for the actual power that sets up and make fall, came from the top of the hill;

Courage in the battle was annulled; for war was directed by the hands of Moses;

The sharp weapons became a laughingstock in the hands of its bearer; for it could not compete with the shadow coming down from the hill;

Swords drawn, arrows flying, and strings singing, all were unable to defeat one unarmed soldier;

Rows assembled threatened, screamed, and scoffed; and were all despised by one man crucified naked on the hill,;

Horses galloping, men terrified, weapons struck; and a silent crucified man on the hill had the power of conquest;

The battle between the two parties was bound to His hands; and by His shadow the war was run;

The controversy between the two armies was controlled by the rod in his hand; wherever it inclined,

+ Elisha was guarded by the angels; who accompanied him wherever he went;

The army of God's servants surround His believers who fear Him, and save them from dangers" (Psalm 34: 7);

The fire-watchers surrounded him on all sides, to keep away any danger or threat;

His disciple who saw the horses and the great hosts of the enemy, was overcome with fear like a little child;

Terrified, he came back to Elisha, and said: “*Alas, my master, what shall we do?*” (2 kings 6: 15);

Elisha, on the other hand, had no fear from the hosts of the enemy, nor from the might of the kings;

He was surrounded by the hosts of God, for; with him were the uncountable fire-watchers and the servants of flames,

The children of fire mounted the horses against the people of Aram, to become a wall around that elect of the house of God;

Once the king of Aram gave the order to attack Elisha, God commanded His servants to confront them;

The Lord gave His sign to the hosts of fire to mount to drive the enemy away from Elisha;

They mounted and came out of the camp of the heavenlies to disturb those who came to attack the elected one;

The mountain was full of the fire hosts who surrounded Elisha, to cast live coal on the men of Aram who approached him;

The servants of the king came down to attack, and the servants of God came down to save;

The fire of the ministers is silently hidden in their persons; but ready to show its might if demanded;

The fire mounted the fearless horses; ready to burn in case anything wrong happens to Elisha.

(St.

(Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles. And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah” (8)

To appease their fearing souls, king Hezekiah did not say: ‘To help us to fight them;’, but said: *“To help us and to fight our battles”*. To encourage them, the prophet Isaiah said: *“Thus says the Lord God of hosts: ‘O My people who dwell in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrian. He shall strike you with a rod, and lift up his staff against you, in the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while and the indignation will cease, as will My anger in their destruction. And the Lord of hosts will stir up a scourge for him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb, as His rod was on the sea, so will he lift it up in the manner of Egypt”* (Isaiah 10: 24-26)

The prophet Isaiah describes the stand of king Hezekiah, saying: *“Your eyes will see the King in His beauty.... Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed Feasts. Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation; a tabernacle that will not be taken down. Not one of its stakes will ever be removed, nor will any of its cords be broken; but there, the majestic Lord will be for us”* (Isaiah 33: 17-21)

3- SENNECHARIB SENDS HIS SERVANTS WITH A MESSAGE TO JERUSALEM:

“After this Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem (but he himself and all the forces with him, laid siege against Lachish), to Hezekiah king of Judah, and to all Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying,” (9)

The second book of the kings 18-19, narrates the episode of Sennacherib blaspheming God; the prayer of Hezekiah, and how Jerusalem was saved from destruction on the hands of the Assyrians, in more detail; while here it came in a concise form.

This episode shows the craftiness of the devil: While Sennacherib was busy putting Lachish under siege, and he heard how Hezekiah was fortifying Jerusalem, and strengthening his people by the spirit of faith, he sent his servants to put terror in the hearts of Hezekiah and his people, to deliver the city before he himself comes leading his army against it. Craftily he addressed the people, in an attempt to shake their loyalty and trust in their king Hezekiah. Through his servants he paraded his past conquests on a multitude of nations, whose gods

could not save them from him; so why now would Hezekiah deceive them saying that their God will save them from his hands.

“Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, ‘In what do you trust that you remain under siege in Jerusalem?’” (10). Sennacherib counted them as already under siege, even before they actually were; not perceiving that he and his army will become under siege by God.

“Does not Hezekiah persuade you to give yourselves over to die by famine and by thirst, saying, ‘The Lord our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria’?”
(11)

Sennacherib did not perceive that Jerusalem had for itself hidden springs of water.

“Has not the same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, ‘You shall worship before one altar, and burn incense on it’?” (12)

“Do you know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands in anyway able to deliver their lands out of my hand?” (13)

Here Rabshakeh revealed his ugly hatred, and uttered rude words against God, boasting in a loud voice about the cities and the nations captivated by the Assyrian king, none of which had been saved by its vain gods. Rabshakeh did not perceive that those gods were no more than wood and stones, the work of human hands. But the God of Judah, or rather the God of the whole universe, on the contrary, is the true God, not recently invented, but is the Creator of all generations, Maker of all things, the Lord of hosts. Rabshakeh assumed that everything shows that all of them will eventually be captivated, even if their God, Great as He is, will come to help them.

As I said before, if the gods of the nations were unable to save their people, that is not true concerning the true God, who is the Great Almighty God, the One with un-conquerable authority; the Lord of hosts; while the others so-called gods are valueless human handiwork.

(St.

Cyril the Great)

“Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you

from my hand?” (14)

“Now therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or persuade you like this, and do not believe him; for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people from my

hand or the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you from my hand?” (15)

“And his servants spoke even more against the Lord God and against His servant Hezekiah” (16)

“He also wrote letters to revile the Lord God of Israel, and to speak against Him saying, ‘As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people from my hand,

so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver his people from my hand” (17)

“Then they called out with a loud voice in Hebrew to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten them and terrify them, that they might take the city” (18)

“And they spoke against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth –the work of men’s hand”(19)

It was Sennacherib’s hope to invade the city and captivate the people without need to enter into a battle against them; the way it was with many other nations which surrendered to him, and even received his army, dancing and singing; even though he, after that did not treat them

well. What Sennacherib said was said before by the enemies of king David: *“There is no help for him in God”* (Psalm 3: 2; 71: 11). He called the living God *“God of Jerusalem”* (19), counting Him a God of one city, the way the other gods of the nations are; and not *“The Creator of heaven and earth”*.

4- HEZEKIAH AND THE PROPHET ISAIAH PRAY TO GOD:

“Now for this cause, king Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed and cried out to heaven” (20)

The affliction was a chance to pray and to cry out to God who dwells in heaven, the place of His throne.

Having heard from Eliakim and Shebna, the words of Sennacherib king of Assyria on the tongue of his messenger Rabshakeh (2 Kings 18), king Hezekiah sent them to the prophet Isaiah, to tell him what happened, Clothed in sackcloth, they came to Isaiah and said: *“Thus says Hezekiah: ‘This day is a day of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth’* (2 Kings 19: 3). Here Hezekiah confessed that the kingdom of Judah was helpless, in a time it needs to be strong, to confront the extremely mighty power in the world – Assyria. Hezekiah’s heart was preoccupied, not with the daring of Rabshakeh to revile the living God, but with that, a day of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy have dwelt upon Judah and Jerusalem.

He likened the day to a day of a difficult childbirth, the time of labor so extended that Judah became completely exhausted, and had no more strength to deliver. The situation has become so serious, that there is need for the intervention of God Himself, the wonder-Maker.. Both Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet cried out to heaven; where He who dwells in heaven was not far away from them; but by prayer to Him, he became very close.

+ He who saves is not far away; and His response came instantly after the prayer.... The zeal of the saints are so effective, that once the glory of God is reviled, He grants them joy when they are sorrowful.

(St.

Cyril the Great)

+ *"It is a day of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy"*Likening it to a woman who suffers torturous labor, when she have no strength to give birth; he means to say that: We are pregnant with Your fear; we labor, and give birth by the spirit of salvation.

(St. Jerome)

5- THE LORD SENDS AN ANGEL TO SAVE HEZEKIAH:

"Then the Lord sent an angel who cut down every mighty man of valor, leader and a captain in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned shamefaced to his own land. And when

he had gone into the temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there" (21)

The blasphemy of the wicked draws the attention of God; so does the cry-out of His suffering people. Having despised the Lord of hosts, Sennacherib, by his own eyes, saw how 185,000 of his army were killed in one night, without a human weapon; Returning shamefaced to his own land, he went into the temple of his god where some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword.

+ God exposed the haughtiness and foolish pride of the Assyrian king; for both the Assyrians and the Persians used to refer their success in combat and invasion of the lands to their authority and might.

(St. Cyril the Great)

“Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side” (22)

In the midst of affliction, the Lord inclines His ear to listen to us, and gives us more than what we ask for. The king and the people cried out to the Lord to save them from the hand of Sennacherib and his army; but the Lord saved them, as well, from all others, guided them on every side, and gave them honor in the sight of all nations

- + The huge number of the Assyrians died, not by the Jewish might, their swords, arrows, nor horses, but by the initiation of an angel of the Lord, who brought them to perdition by an inexpressible might., and a miraculous way, that brought terror even into the heart of Sennacherib, the haughty leader, who returned to his own land, shamefaced, and without his entire army.

(St. Cyril the
Great)

6- HEZEKIAH BECAME SICK AND GOD HEALED HIM:

“And many brought gifts to the Lord at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter” (23)

Seeing by their own eyes how the mighty hand of God, protects those who trust in Him, many people brought gifts to the Lord in Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah, counting him as a friend of the Lord.

“In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death, and he prayed to the Lord; and He spoke to him and gave him a sign” (24)

Hezekiah's illness came here only in one verse (24), as it already came in detail in 2 Kings 20: 1-11; Isaiah 38: 1-8, 21-22; and the writings of Jesuphus'..

- + *“Hezekiah was sick and near death”*; and the prophet came to him to persuade him to set his house in order; not that he did not know that he will live, but rather to exhort him to pray, so that through his prayer he would enjoy the mercy of God. God, above anything else, is compassionate upon those who love Him; and grants the requests of the faithful, as it happened in this particular case. God of all rejoices in their godly life, and responds to the supplications of those who lead an upright life, when He sees that their prayers are raised with tears, and labor.

(St. Cyril the Great)

“God gave him a sign”, which as it came in (Isaiah 38: 8): *“Behold, I will bring the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz ten degrees backward; so the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it has gone down”*. According to St. Cyril the Great: [It is said that Ahaz father of Hezekiah, has elaborately built ten steps in his own house; according to the way by which the clock-makers make clocks to monitor the movements of the sun. By such a sign, God convinced Hezekiah that he is going back to life, the way the shadow of the sun returned backward, and the day extended in a unique way; For nothing is out of the authority of the God of all; What He chooses will be realized, simply because He wishes it to be.

7- HEZEKIAH'S HEART LIFTED UP:

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“But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor shown him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem”
(25)

Even though no one around Hezekiah perceived his hidden fall; for he still seemed to all as a godly and faithful man; Yet God’s wrath came upon him for the sake of the pride of his heart and his hidden haughtiness, Despite his wisdom and uprightness, Hezekiah could not endure the favor shown him, specially his conquest over Assyria, and his cure from his severe illness. Even though he had no favor of what he has got, yet his heart was lifted up because of those honors. The surrounding nations brought him gifts; and the king of Babylon sent him ambassadors to show him compassion . While Hezekiah prevailed upon the idol-worship, he fell in deifying himself . It was befitting of him, instead of pride, to proclaim: *“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?”* (Psalm 116: 12)

What happened to Hezekiah provoke us to the following:

- a- To seek from the Holy Spirit of God to work in us, to keep us from perversion away from the way of uprightness.
- b- To give God thanks on His benefits toward us.
- c- To pray for the sake of our leaders, to keep them from falling in what David did, when he gave the commanded to number the people; nor in what Hezekiah fell whose heart was lifted up.

According to Isaiah, when the king of Babylon sent messages and gifts to Hezekiah (Isaiah 39: 1), instead of talking to the ambassadors about what the Lord has done to him, Hezekiah was so pleased with their visit that he showed them all his treasures, and all his armory; There was nothing in his house, or in all his dominion that he did not show them. (Isaiah 39: 2-3).

According to St. Cyril the Great, the king of Babylon apparently sent his ambassadors and gifts to congratulate Hezekiah on his cure from his illness; but the fact is that the Babylonians and the Chaldeans, being experts in astronomy and the movements of the stars, have been

confused to see how the day was extended in a unique way, which they could not explain by their study; which happened as a fulfillment of God's promise to Hezekiah. Merdoch, king of Babylon was equally astonished at what God did to save Jerusalem from the siege on the hand of Rabshakeh the leader of his army; and at how the angel of the Lord , in one night struck dead 185,000 (Isaiah 37: 36-37). But instead of glorifying the Lord before them Hezekiah fell in pride.

- + The ambassadors came bearing the admiration of Merdoch on Hezekiah's righteousness , as a fruit of all those divine signs; It was befitting of Hezekiah to use the chance to give a shining report to them about the incredible and glorious help of the Mighty God, in the right time; to let them return to their land rich with the knowledge about the exalted work and the authority of the unconquerable God of all, taught to them by teachers appointed by Hezekiah for this purpose, to become in turn of benefit to others. But instead of all that, Hezekiah was loaded with vain human pride; and referred his success, not to God, but to himself and to the riches of his kingdom.

"Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah" (26)

Humility before the Lord is the practical way to enjoy His mercies and compassion; whereas our pride will make him chastise us by delivering us into the hands of our enemies.

- + Pride is a sin hated by God; according to the word of the Holy Book, saying: "*The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord*" (Sirach 10: 12); and "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*" (1 Peter 5: 5). Hence if someone despises the humility of Christ "*Who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men; ... He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*" (Philippians 2: 6-8); And if he is lifted up, hastened to reach authority and high positions; and sought the skills which would help him to achieve all

that, even if they contradict his faith and religion, and does not care as long as he gets what he covets to, Then he would end up with what is written: "*He does evil in the sight of the Lord*" (Judges 3: 7). And after he achieves the highest temporal level of power and greatness, "*he would fall and be delivered to one of the followers of the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience*" (Ephesians 2: 2) to one of the followers of the prince of air (Ephesians 2: 2), the same way it happened in the days of Pharaoh (Exodus 1: 11), and those of Hiram king of Tyre (1 Kings 9: 11); for God will humiliate whoever lifts himself up, weakens him until he returns to his senses, and searches for the Lord; on account of that when he continues in glorifying himself, he does not know about God.

(The scholar Origen)

+ Do you like to know the power of repentance?

Do you want to know the strong weapon of salvation, and to perceive the power of confession?

By confession, Hezekiah caused 185,000 of his enemies to perish (2 Kings 19: 25). Yet that great achievement is counted as nothing compared to what I shall tell you. For by repentance the king could get a change in the divine decision already uttered. For, after the prophet Isaiah came to him and said: "*Set your house in order for you shall die and not live*" (2 kings 20: 1); Could there ever be any exception or hope? But Hezekiah did not cease his repentance, and by remembering what is written: "*If you return and weep you shall be saved*", while on bed, he turned his face toward the wall, raising his mind toward heaven (when the walls could not stand in the way of fervent prayers), and said, "Remember me, O Lord, Heal me".

You, O Lord, the Creator of time; the Grantor of the law of life, and its ordinance according to Your will; And as our life does not depend upon our date of birth, nor upon the movements of the stars, as some foolishly believe; ... he who should have lost any hope for life, after such prophetic utterance, had fifteen years added to his life; and the

sign given to him was that the shadow of the sun retreated ten degrees backwards (2 Kings 20: 11).

Well, for Hezekiah's sake, the sun retreated, but for the sake of Christ, it eclipsed altogether, proclaiming the difference between Hezekiah and Christ.

Now, O believer, turn back and mourn yourself; Shut up your doors, and pray to be forgiven!

Pray that the burning fire would turn away from you; for God has the authority to quench even the fire; and to mute even the lions.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

“Hezekiah had very great riches and honor. And he made himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of desirable items” (27)

“Storehouses for the harvest of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of livestock, and folds for flocks” (28)

“Moreover he provided cities for himself, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him very much property” (29)

“This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the city of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his works” (30)

The affliction turned for the good; for, anticipating the attack of the Assyrians, Hezekiah stopped the water outlet of upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the city of David (30), to the old pool (Isaiah 22: 11), and the upper pool (Isaiah 7: 3), to a new location called “the lower pool” (*Isaiah 22: 9*).. Hezekiah made the springs of Gihon and those of the running river, extend to inside the walls of Jerusalem; about which the psalmist says: “*All my springs are in you*” (Psalm 87: 7); and Solomon the sage says: “*Drink water from your own*

cistern, and running water from your own well" (Proverb 5: 15). All our springs are the Trinity dwelling in us, who pours the divine love upon us.

- + There are wells wherever there are hidden water running strong in the Word and teachings; once the lowly things that cover it are taken away. It is necessary, therefore, for each one of us to set for himself a well, to realize what is written: *"Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well"* (Proverb 5: 15); By that we would be called children of those who dug the wells: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, we should not dig a pit, lest we would fall into it; and be worthy of the words uttered by God on the tongue of the prophet Jeremiah, to rebuke the sinners, saying: *"For my people have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns (Lakkous) that can hold no water"* (Jeremiah 2: 13)

(St. Basil the Great)

'However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon who were sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that he might know all that is in his heart' (31)

The ambassadors of the princes of Babylon came, not to fight, but to rejoice, and to enquire about two issues:

- a- How he managed to get such a victory on the Assyrians, the bitter enemies of Babylon.
- b- If the sun, the god of the Assyrians, could not serve them, but served him who worship the living God; and honored him by retreating ten degrees backward; they considered Hezekiah an amazing person before whom their god – the sun – would bow down.

But unfortunately Hezekiah's heart was lifted up and referred everything to himself, and not to God as it came in the book of the kings.

8- HEZEKIAH'S DEATH AND BURIAL:

“Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, indeed they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel” (32)

What preoccupied the author was Hezekiah's spiritual condition, and not his political and military achievements.

“So Hezekiah rested with his fathers, and they buried in the upper tombs of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him at his death. Then Manasseh his son reigned in his place” (33)

At his death he was honored by his people:

- 1- The prophet Isaiah wrote his life story and his works in the Lord.
- 2- His people buried him in the upper tombs of the sons of David.
- 3- They most probably made for him a great cremation; in which it was the custom to burn precious spices during the funeral of kings; and a great mourning like that on the death of Josiah.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 32

BE WITH ME, O LORD, AND FIGHT MY BATTLES

- + O my Lord, how amazing are You in Your love for me!
You have created me to live on earth, as though in a joyful paradise

But by my disobedience I gave you the back and not the face;
I isolated myself from You, O the source of my happiness;
The earth turned into a battle field against the devil and the hosts of darkness.

+ I hear Your voice on the tongue of the godly prophet Isaiah; saying:
Do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria;
Nor before all the multitude that is with him;
For there are more with us than with him
You are with us, O Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles;
In You, O Lord of hosts, I hide;
The devil and all his hosts cannot approach me;
You are my shield, stronghold, and salvation.

+ I shall not take refuge in any human arm, and no human wisdom will captivate me;
For You move even the angelic hosts to rescue me;
You have come Yourself; and You will come again to bring me forth to eternity;

+ King Hezekiah was in need of the prophet Isaiah to pray with him and for his sake;
Behold, I seek from all my fathers and brethren in paradise,
To support me by their prayers before the throne of grace.
For their hearts are aflame with longing for the salvation of all men;
Their praise for You are mixed with love for their striving brethren;

+ Having rescued Hezekiah from the Assyrian army and healed him from his severe illness;

He fell into pride; and boasted his riches before the strangers;
He prevailed upon the outside enemies;
But, he fell into pride that enslaved him;
By humility, he acquired Your mercy;
Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of humility, to approach You;
To attach myself to You, all the days of my sojourn;

Keep me safe until my last breath.



CHAPTER 33

KING MANASSEH AND HIS SON KING AMON

This chapter narrates the great evil committed by king Manasseh (687-642 B.C.). The talk here came conforming, word by word to what came in (2 Kings 21: 1-9)

With all the possibilities of power, authority, and riches enjoyed By Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32: 27-29), he did not pervert from God's way or His commandments; But on the contrary, these possibilities which came all of a sudden, have revealed the hidden goals in the heart of his son Manasseh who succeeded him.

In the history of Hezekiah, we saw how God revealed to him the coming captivity of Judah to Babylon , as a result of the sin of pride into which he has fallen. When Hezekiah and his people humbled themselves before that verdict, God postponed its execution to a later date after the death of Hezekiah. After the death of Hezekiah, the position of Judah, as far as its relationship with God is concerned; deteriorated and it ended up by taking Manasseh, shackled by chains to Babylon, that was at that time under the dominion of Assyria.

The reign of Manasseh that lasted 55 years is divided into three stages:

- a-The period of idol-worship
- b- His fall into captivity
- c- His return from captivity; when he cried out to God as though from the depth of a pit, humbled himself before the Lord God of his fathers, and confessed his sins, to become a new man.

The book of the kings did not mention Manasseh's fall into captivity, repentance, and confession of his sins; probably because the multitude of his horrible evil sins, and the long time during which he committed them, continued to have their impact on the people, even after his repentance. Although the book of kings disregarded Manasseh's repentance, yet it did not deny it; but the goal of the author was to reveal the evil of the people that led to their perdition. Here in the book of chronicles, his repentance is mentioned in some detail, together with a mention of God's mercies, longsuffering, and the power of His grace, the grantor of renewal. According to some, while the book of the kings cares to talk about the people; the book of chronicles, on the other hand, is preoccupied with the personal condition of the king.

1- Manasseh's evils and apostasy from God	1 - 10
2- Manasseh's repentance and prosperity	11 - 17
3- The end of Manasseh's reign	18 - 20
4- King Amon and his evils	21 - 25
5- The prayer of Manasseh	

1- MANASSEH'S EVILS AND APOSTASY FROM GOD:

"Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem" (1)

Manasseh was born three years after the extension of life his father Hezekiah got. This makes some people wonder: Was Hezekiah's grief when Isaiah came to tell him about his death, because he had no son to succeed him (2 kings 20: 1)? ... While some others wonder: if Hezekiah had no son to inherit him, how could Isaiah say to him: *"Behold, the days are coming when all that in your house, ... shall be carried to Babylon ... and they shall take away some of your*

sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” (2 kings 20: 17-18)?

It could be said that, until the day of his severe illness and the coming of the prophet Isaiah to tell him of his death, Hezekiah had no children; and the prophet was talking about the children he will beget by the spirit of prophecy; Most probably Manasseh was his eldest son. ... I wonder if the godly Hezekiah was negligent in raising his son, to end up being spoiled, not committed to a befitting spiritual life; to pervert after evil desires, and to incline his ear toward evil counselors.

“But he did evil in the sight of the lord according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel” (2)

- a- He built, or allowed for the restoration of the pagan temples in the land, destroying all what his father Hezekiah has done.
- b- He defiled the temple of God, itself, by setting pagan altars in it (4-5)
- c- He restored the practice of offering human sacrifice, by offered his own sons.
- d- He practiced soothsaying, witchcraft, and sorcery. (6)

The sins of Manasseh were recorded in (2 kings 21: 3-6; Jeremiah 7: 31); in which the words of the Lord came, saying:: *“They have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and did not come into My heart”.*

The reader may stand astonished at that quick turn of events in one generation, from a king who dedicated all his energies to work to the account of the kingdom of God, to his son who destroyed all what his father did, and dedicated all his energies to the account of idol-worship.... According to some the salvation of

Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah, all of a sudden, without entering into battle, made some believe that Jerusalem will never fall any day, whatever the evil of its king or people I, which motivated Manasseh to get into so much evil desires; something against which the prophet Jeremiah warned in (Jeremiah 7: 4). Manasseh was such a violent killer, to offer his own children as human sacrifices (2 kings 21: 3-11). According to the Jewish historian Josephus: [Manasseh killed all the godly men among the Jews, in a barbaric way; and did not exempt even the prophets, of whom he killed some every day, until Jerusalem turned into a sea of blood].. ... One of the prominent prophets killed by Manasseh was the great Isaiah, whom the king commanded to be sown into two pieces.

“For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshipped all the hosts of heaven and served them” (3)

“He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, ‘In Jerusalem shall my name be forever’” (4)

“And he built altars for all the hosts of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord” (5)

“Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire of the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and

spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger” (6)

He defiled the house of the Lord; caused his sons to pass through the fire for the god Melok;; and made the evil practices of the devil, the sources of his guidance and counsel. He was like the Satan-worshippers in the modern age.

“He even set a carved image, the idol which he has made in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, ‘In this house, and in Jerusalem, which

I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever” (7)

The carved image was a statue of the king himself set to be worshipped in the house of God.

“and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers – only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the

whole law, and the statutes, and the ordinances by the hand of Moses” (8)

He despised God’s choice of Zion as the place of His comfort forever, and of Israel as His people, with whom He made a covenant.

“So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel” (9)

The perversion of Manasseh pushed the kingdom to fall quickly into the pit; to demonstrate the great difference between his reign and that of his father; so that Judah became more evil than the nations.

“And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen” (10)

Manasseh and his people did not listen to the voice of the Lord. In all that we notice the following:

- a- Although it may look strange, yet it is extremely sorrowful, to see how some children who were raised in good and holy homes, resist God, and deny themselves of His grace. It is therefore befitting of the parents to pray to God to let His grace work in their children and grandchildren. For, although they can provide them with riches and temporal honors; yet the godliness needs the grace of God to work in them.
- b- It is befitting of the church that walks by the Spirit, to seek fervently from God to keep the future generations from perversion, but to grow in the Spirit, and come to be more spiritual than how it is now.

2- MANASSEH'S REPENTANCE AND PROSPERITY:

“Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon” (11)

The word 'Babylon' here does not refer to the city of Babylon, but to the region of 'Babilonia' in the Assyrian empire. Nineveh was in that region, which is Iraq nowadays.

Having resisted God Himself, and worshipped the idols, Manasseh was humiliated by the pagan captain of the Assyrian army. If the devil exerts his effort to seduce the believer to do evil; once he falls, he will be humiliated by evil itself.

There is a story connected to the captivation of Manasseh.. It is claimed that the king of Assyria probably 'Assur Panipal", whose brother acted as his deputy in Babylon during his absence so seemed to revolt against his brother the lawful king. In the year 648 B.C, the king prevailed upon that revolt; but suspecting that Manasseh had a role in it,, he intended to humiliate him. In his calamity,

Manasseh did not take the position of stubbornness, as Ahaz did, doubling his transgression.

God's anger is love and compassion:

I was astonished by the amazing work of God, for while having the following verses before my eyes to write my commentary on them, one of the beloved brethren called to admonish me, that in my talk about the comforts of the Lord of glory Jesus Christ to many, during the events of the explosion on the eve of the new year before the church of St. Mark and Pope Peter in Alexandria, and about the amazing blessings offered by God to the church, I said that we are committed to remember that this temptation is a call to every believer to truly practice repentance; for it would provoke God to anger to see us as, His children, get slothful oftentimes with sin.

God's anger, particularly on His church or His children, is not revenge like that of men, nor a kind of hatred on His part, For God truly loves mankind, particularly those who are attached to Him. The following words by St. (mar) Jacob El-Serougi, reveal the exaltation and sweetness of God's anger. God calls us to bear His image, and to seek unceasingly our whole life, *"till we all come to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4: 13). God allows for us to pass through afflictions, on account of that they support us, by His grace, to join amidst the rank of the heavenlies.

+ Glory be to You, O my God, for you, by all means and ways, intend to gain all who listen with discernment;

By righteousness and grace, you, as a Physician, approach all those who need health;

The life-giver cares to heal all men;

With Him are anger, forgiveness, peace, and love;

On one side, he pours great gifts on whoever ask Him; and on another, He denies a drop of water to others;

His mercies mix with fear; and His revenge with great compassion;

He threatens and gives joy; and is always full of mercy;

On one side He called the robber to enter paradise (Luke 23: 43); and on another, he sent away those who have done many wonders (Matthew 7: 22)

At one time, He received the tears of a harlot (Luke 7: 44); and at another, He told the daughters of Jerusalem to weep no more (Luke 23: 28)

At one time He gave a dinari to the late laborers, and at another He drove the priests out of His kingdom (Matthew 8: 12);

He did not recognize those who cast out demons in His name (Matthew 7: 22); and said to the robber: "*Today you will be with Me in paradise*" (Luke 23: 43);

He called a tax-collector to follow Him (Matthew 9: 9); and sent away another who followed him (Matthew 8: 19-20)

"He did all that for the sake of the life of men; for, by all means, He does not allow for the perdition of any of the Father's household;

He warned the good, lest they trust in boasting; and encouraged the wicked lest they fall into despair;

By His wisdom He rebuked the proud; and by His grace He called them to repent;

He said: If you do wonders with the intention to boast, you do not know Me; And He who is a tax-collector and has love, let him come to Me;

He who casts out demons to become puffed up, is a doer of iniquity; A weeping harlot is far better than him;

To the daring, he set the foundation of Hades; and provoked the slothful by the parable of the late laborers;

At the same time He made the former long for repentance, He put fear in the later when He said: "*The last will be first, and the first last*" (Matthew 20: 16)

O sinner, you will have great hope if you repent; And he put fear in the righteous lest he may become slothful;

He seems harsh with the evil ones; and full of compassion on the sinners;
He is a very prudent Physician; With all He becomes like all, and cleverly
gives help to everyone.

To the able, He gives solid food; and to the sick He gives what suits his
condition.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and
humbled himself greatly before the Lord of his fathers” (12)*

In the Chaldean version came the following addition: [The Chaldeans put
Manasseh in a bronze mule, full of holes, and made fire around it. And while in
this misery, he sought the help from the idols he made, and got nothing for they
are useless, he therefore repented and prayed before the Lord his God, and
humbled himself greatly in the sight of the Lord, God of his fathers]..

Although Manasseh presented a repentance, and reformed his ways, traces of
the evil he has done for a long time remained among the rulers and the people;
that when Josiah did his reforms, he could not change the destiny of Jerusalem
to fall before the Babylonians; and the collapse before the Babylonian captivity
was counted as a result of the sins of Manasseh (2 Kings 24: 3).

Despite the multitude of Manasseh's iniquities, and the bitterness of their impact
upon the rulers and the people, God responded to his repentance; for it came
according to His pleasure, being said:

- a- **“He implored the Lord his God”**(12). Man may confess his evil, as Judas
did after betraying His Lord Jesus Christ; Yet he does not seek the Lord.
The main element in repentance, is not only to recognize our sins and to

confess them; but we are committed to the positive side, namely, to long to return to the Lord , to get attached to Him, and to serve Him; which we touch in the repentance of the apostle Peter after denying the Lord; and here we touch in Manasseh's.

b- **“He humbled himself greatly before the Lord of his fathers”** (12); For the Lord is close to the humble.

c- **“He prayed to God”** (13). He was justified by seeking the Lord by the whole heart, and humbling himself before..

+ Nothing would grieve us like seeing him, who falls into sins, find pleasure in recalling them, instead of preoccupying his mind with the beautiful ways of knowing God.

Adam hid himself when he felt the presence of God, who called his name, saying: *“Adam, where are you?”* (Genesis 9: 3); namely, Where and why do you hide from God whom you always longed to see?!

(St. Ambrose)

+ As the earth does not give fruition without seeds... man will not be able to offer repentance without humility and the labor of his body.

(St. Isaiah of the Askit)

+ The extended prayer, and the dense tears, draw the mercy of God.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Our way, as well, is to supplicate to God to rid us of the old man, and clothe us with the heavenly Christ ... For when the Lord, intending to satisfy us with His kingdom, he said: "*Without Me you can do nothing*" (John 15: 5). Everyone of us should strive to supplicate to God, to be counted worthy of getting the treasure of the heavenly Spirit; to be able, without much labor to consummate all the commandments of the Lord with purity, and blamelessly..

(St. Maccari the Great)

"And prayed to Him, and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God" (13)

We know nothing about the duration of his captivity, nor about how he got out of it.

But 'Adam Clark', quoting most probably from the Chaldean version, which is obviously a consummation of the previous addition in verse 12; said that while Manasseh was praying inside the bronze mule, all the angels and archangels set forth to shut off all the gates of prayers, and all the openings and windows of heaven, before his prayer. Here, the mercies of the Creator of the world, who stretches his right hand to receive the sinners who turn to fear Him, and whose hearts are crushed by repentance, came into action; He made an opening in heaven underneath the throne of His glory, through which He listened to Manasseh's prayer, and, with compassion, He received his request. The earth then quaked by the Word of God; the bronze mule burst open, the king fled, and was helped by the Spirit who came out from the wings of the cherubim, inspired through a decree from the Word of God, to carry him back to his kingdom in Jerusalem. There, Manasseh, recognizing that it is the Lord God who did all

those miracles and wonders; forsook all his idols, worshipped them no more, and returned to the Lord with his whole heart.

Such addition, although showing the compassion of God, yet it does not conform to how the Holy Book looks at the heavenly hosts, who desire the salvation of men, and praise the Lord the Savior for the sake of His love toward men.

God allowed for Manasseh to go through all that bitter humiliation; so that he would not go to Babylon without it, and worship the gods of the Babylonians. Re-evaluating himself, Manasseh perceived that the gods he worshipped were unable to help him; and that there was no other way but to return to the living God with repentance and humility. ... The fruition of Manasseh's repentance were:

- a- **He knew that the Lord is God**; What he could not learn from his godly father, while being raised spoiled in the royal palace, he perceived while shackled in bronze chains, and held by a hook in his nose , living in humility in Babylon.
- b- **He cared to build the walls of his city** (14); and he, as well built high walls for his depths to keep them safe from the hidden enemy
- c- **He removed the foreign gods** and cast them out of the city (15).
- d- **He returned to the worship of the living God**; and repaired the altar of the Lord (16), that was neglected for a long time, or have been broken down by the priests of the idols; and on it he offered peace and thanksgiving offerings for his salvation.

As he previously led his people astray, and provoked them to worship the idols; Manasseh, after his repentance, "*commanded Judah to serve the Lord of Israel*" (26). Yet, although he could bring them away from worshipping the false gods, they continued to worship the Lord on the high places.(17). According to

Josephus, all the rest of his life, he changed to the better, and was considered a blessed man.

+ Our beloved children, We saw how the Lord punished Manasseh for some time; he who was addicted to idol-worship, and has slaughtered a multitude of good men; And yet He received him when he repented, forgave him, and brought him back to his kingdom. He does not only forgive those who repent, but He restores to them their past honors.

+ Although Manasseh was so extremely evil (2 kings 21: 2-7); that he sawed Isaiah into two pieces, was defiled with all the abominations of idol-worship, covered Jerusalem with the blood of the innocent; but, once he was captivated , he resorted to repentance as a remedy, humbled himself before the Lord, and so fervently prayed, that God listened to him and restored him to his kingdom (2 Kings 33: 12). If repentance saved him who sowed such a great prophet like Isaiah, will it not save you who committed nothing of the sort?!

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

+ The Father listens to you, even when you talk to yourself, hastens to encounter you while you are still far away; sees you and runs toward you;
He knows what is in your heart, and hastens lest anyone would delay you, and embraces you;

‘Encountering you’ is a proof that he already knows you; and ‘embracing you’ is a proclamation of His mercy, and an expression of His fatherly love;

He falls on your neck to lift you up, you fallen under the burden of sins, and brings you back to heaven to seek your Creator;

Christ falls on your neck, to save your neck from the yoke of servitude,
and to put on you His light yoke (Matthew 11: 30);

He falls on your neck, and says: "*Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give your rest*" (Matthew 11: 28). ... So the Lord will embrace you when you repent

+ O, Wholly Truth, how can I sing to you?

I have vowed to dedicate this day as a Feast to you;

But I am full of darkness, even before the night falls;

I will surely present to You my prayer; but shall I be able to keep the
splendor of Your blameless ray?

My feet gave way, and fallen on the ground, my dark enemy came and
robbed me of the flame of heaven

Help my darkness, to become light, O Lord.

+ O Son of God, By Your love, open before me the great door; For you are the door, and the way of life to those who walk in You.

O Good Friend, With You, I walk to Him who sent You; For the wicked through his attachment to the world, was accompanied by many;

By You, I approach to talk to You; O Teacher of life; For without You no man can look at You.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“After this he built a wall outside the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate; and it enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height. Then he put military captains in all the fortified cities of Judah” (14)

He probably rebuilt and strengthened the weak points in the wall, which were broken down by the Assyrians.

“He took away the foreign gods and the idols from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem, and he cast them out of the city” (15)

To purify the worship of the true God, with all his effort, he took away the foreign gods and idols set by himself, and cast everything that concern the pagan

worship out of the city. He should have destroyed them, because his son after him unfortunately brought them back.

“He also repaired the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings and thanks offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord of Israel” (16)

“Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, but only to the Lord their God” (17). (As it also came in the ‘Tergom’).

3- THE END OF MANASSEH’S REIGN:

“Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the Lord God of Israel, indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Israel” (18) (As it also came in the ‘Tergom’).

It so seems that after his repentance, intending to testify to the mercy and longsuffering of God, he sent his confession to the seers (the prophets) who spoke to him in the name of the God of Israel, to bring joy to their hearts, for they have for so long rebuked him on his evil deed and he did not listen to them.

“Also his prayer and how God received his entreaty, and all his sin and trespass, and the sites where he built high places, and set up wooden images and carved images, before he was humbled, indeed they are written among the sayings of Hozai” (19)

+ Manasseh committed limitless abominations, brought them into the house of God, stretched his hand against the saints, and filled the city with the dead; yet after so much persistent evil, he cleansed himself from all those things, ... How did he do that? ... By repentance!.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“So Manasseh rested with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house. Then his son Amon reigned in his place” (20)

God often showed either his approval or displeasure with a king in his burial:

- a- Many of the kings of Judah were buried in the city of David in the tombs of the kings; when they were not better than others.
- b- Some of them were denied being buried in those tombs; as it was said about Joash who killed the priest Zechariah the son of Jehoiada: *“They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings” (24: 25)*
- c- Uzziah was buried in the field of burial which belonged to the kings, for they said, “He is a leper” for his attempt to force himself upon priesthood (26: 23).
- d- Ahaz, the apostate from faith, *“was buried in the city, in Jerusalem, but they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel” (28: 27).*
- e- Manasseh was buried in his own house (20), or in its garden, as it came in 2 kings 21: 18; according to his own will, having felt in his depths that he is not worthy to be buried in the tombs of the king.
- f- Three of the four last kings of Judah, (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, died in Egypt, or in Babylon; and in Jehoiakim, the judgment proclaimed by Jeremiah was realized: *“His body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night” (36: 30).*

The prayer of Manasseh:

This prayer of Manasseh came in the Septuagint version under the title [The prayer of Manasseh king of Judah during his captivity in Babylon]; and is read or praised with, on the night of Apocalypse; In it came:

{You, O Lord, did not make repentance for the righteous Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; those who did not sin to You, but made it for people like me, a sinner. For I sinned more than the count of the sand on the sea shore]

He confessed his horrible sins, and prayed, saying:

[Forgive me, O Lord, and do not bring me to perdition with my iniquities; You are the God of the repentant; I shall praise You all the days of my life}.

The affliction fulfilled its purpose; and Manasseh faithfully presented repentance, which God received and listened to his supplication, and brought him back to his kingdom in Jerusalem. In him, "God showed all longsuffering" (1 Timothy 1: 16; Isaiah 1: 18).

4- AMON THE EVIL KING:

"Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem" (21)

"But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done; for Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and served them" (22)

It was a mistake by Manasseh, when he repented and cast away the idols outside the city, that he did not burn or crush them, as indicated by the law (Genesis 7: 50; For it so happened when Amon reigned, he knew how to bring them back, set them in their places, and offered sacrifices to them.

“And he did not humble himself before the Lord, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more”
(23)

He went back to what his father did before his repentance, re-established the idol-worship, and did not humble himself like his father, but within the two years of his rein he increased his evil more than his father (33).

Amon did not present a repentance in humility as his father did (23); Or he probably put in his heart to repent in the last days of his life, as his father did, who reigned for 55 years; while he himself was killed only two years after he sat on the throne.

He was killed in his own house, and the book of the chronicles did not say where he was buried But in 3 kings 21: 26, it came that, like his father, he was buried in the garden of Uzziah.

“Then his servants conspired against him, and killed him in his own house” (24)

“But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against king Amon. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place” (25)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 33

THE DOORS OF YOUR LOVE ARE OPEN BEFORE ALL SINNERS

+ Glory be to You, O my Good Savior;

You let the evil Manasseh reign 55 long years;
You suffered long on him, hoping that he would eventually return to You;
He dedicated all his energies to spread idol-worship;
He defiled Your pure house and pure altar;
He set a statue with his image in Your house;
As though he intends to sit on Your divine throne;
He offered some of his children sacrifices to the demons;
He offered them to be burned; counting this as worship;
With ferocity, he did what the vicious beasts would neverdo.

+ His evil brought over him unbearable bitterness;
He was led like a beast to captivity;
Where he lived in reproach and disgrace;
You allowed for him to be chastised, but not as revenge for what he did;
But like a scalpel in the hand of a physician;
You sought his cure, salvation, and eternal glory.

+ Once his heart moved, heaven moved exultant;
You did not endure the sighs of his heart and his tears;
You forgave him all what he has done;
You brought him back to his kingdom in Jerusalem;
By that, O my Savior, You opened the door of hope before all sinners;
Who will not return to You, O Forgiver of sins, to be purified by Your
precious blood?

Who will not praise You, who prepare the glories for us?

=====

THE REFORMS OF KING JOSIAH

(2 Chronicles 34 to 35)

Out of the twenty kings of Judah – 19 kings and queen Athaliah -- we can say that only eight kings could be described as good, although some of them had their serious faults. Those were: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Uzzia (Azariah), Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

Josiah could be considered as one of the great reformer kings of Judah, and their last. Whom the prophet Jeremiah presented as a role model, that was befitting of his successor to imitate. Saying about him: *“Did not your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and the needy; then it was well. Was not this knowing Me?, says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 22: 15-16).

It is amazing how God allowed for such a movement of reform, a little while before captivity; after the reign of Manasseh and Amon, who submerged Judah in idol-worship and sin. God intended to give hope; that in all eras, there is salvation for all who seek to return to Him.

The era of Josiah, considered as the last glimpse of light from the last candle that was almost quenched, to be followed by a long pitch night of darkness; until the true King comes, to shine with the light of His righteousness upon those sitting in the darkness.

The life of king Josiah will remain a joyful portrait that fills the soul with hope. Although he was born by an evil father from an evil grandfather, in a corrupt religious atmosphere, and a corrupt royal palace; and although he sat on the throne while eight years of age, under the guardianship of some people who did not care for what is God's; Yet, he got attached to the Lord; and started a reform movement on the level of the temple and all Judah, and even Israel, as much as he could.

God allowed for the appearance of such person, just before the collapse of Judah and Israel, to let the rulers and the people experience glorious years, that would come to testify against them, that they were able to choose the way of the Lord.

Josiah's era is characterized by the following important features:

- a- The gradual collapse of Assyria, that gave Josiah the chance to start acting independently from them.
- b- Josiah's care to repair the temple led to the discovery of the book of the law in the eighteenth year of his reign (2 Kings 22: 3). And reading it led to the renewal of the covenant of the king and the whole people with God.
- c- The celebration of the Feast of Passover.

CHAPTER 34

KING JOSIAH

He was born in the year 648 B.C., sat on the throne in the year 640 B.C. (under guardianship); became a father in his sixteenth year of age (36: 2); And in the year 628 B.C. when he reached twenty years of age, when the kingdom become in his hands, he started his religious reforms (3 – 7); in which we notice the following:

- a- He removed the Canaanite gods from the land; (The Assyrian gods were removed by king Manasseh (33: 15).
- b- His reform extended to the tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, where he purged their lands from the idols. He could do that because Assyria began to weaken militarily. And could no more approach Jerusalem; as the last Assyrian emperor Assurbanipal (668-633) died, and no one of his successors could threaten the western part of the Fertile Crescent. Besides, the time of the revolt of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar on Assyria drew near (626-605), and Assyria fell before Babylon in the year 614 B.C.; Ninevah in the year 612; Haran in the year 610 B.C.; and the mighty Assyria was no more.

The prophet Jeremiah was behind Josiah's reforms. He was born in the year 614 B.C. the same year when Josiah sat on the throne, and received the prophecy after the discovery of the Book of the Law when he was 16 years old; that is why Jeremiah felt that he cannot speak for he is just a 'boy' (Jeremiah 1: 6), too young for the prophetic task.

Josiah's reforms were bound to the discovery of the Book of the Law, which, according to scholars since the eras of the early fathers, was the Book of Deuteronomy, or a specific part of it.

1- The personality of king Josiah

1 -2

2- Josiah's zeal to remove the idols

3 - 7

3- Josiah's care to repair the temple

8 - 13

4- The discovery of the Book of the Law of the Lord in the temple

14 - 28

5- Reading the Book of the Law of God in a public assembly

29 – 33

The second book of the kings has already included much of those issues.

1- THE PERSONALITY OF KING JOSIAH:

“Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem” (1)

“And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (2)

Josiah “**walked in the ways of his father David**”; which was said about two of his great grandfathers; namely Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah; an expression which means that those kings put their father David before their eyes, as a role model

in his faithful love for the Lord and His people; and in his worship, exultant with the Spirit.

Yet, despite the uprightness of the king's heart, the people were not as upright; for according to the prophet Jeremiah, about the kingdom of Judah: *"And yet for all this, her (Israel's) treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretence, says the Lord"* (Jeremiah 3: 10)

Although Josiah cared for the holy life, yet, in his zeal, he did not go beyond his limits; he did not pervert to the right, to self-righteousness, and trust in his human arm, nor to the left, by being slothful with evil. He walked along the golden royal path; and did what was right in the sight of the Lord; yet, being still a child, he left the ordinance of things into the hands of others.

"He did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" For the eyes of his heart did not look to the right, nor to the left, nor behind; *"he forgot these things which are behind and reached forward to those things which are ahead"* (Philippians 3: 13).. He looked upward to seek the heavenly things; according to the words of the apostle: *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek these things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God"* (Colossians 3: 1)

- + The apostle Paul spiritually danced when he reached forward to those things which are ahead for our sake; and forgot what is behind, putting his goal before his eyes, seeking the reward of Christ ... This dancing goes hand in hand with faith, and is accompanied by grace.

(St. Ambrose)

- + While he was running on the ground, the reward was dangling down from heaven before his eyes; he ran on the ground, but ascended by the Spirit. ... Notice how his eyes were always on the reward.

- + If you are satisfied, you are lost... Proceed, and keep on proceeding... Do not stop in your place... and never go back, nor go astray from the right path.

(St. Augustine)

- + It is befitting of us, even if we were entrusted with the least important of work, to practice them with great zeal and love; knowing for sure that what is done for God could never be of no importance, but it is for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

2- Josiah's zeal to remove the idols:

“For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images” (3)

It is obvious that the early prophecies of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 2-3), were contemporary with Josiah's early efforts, in rooting out and destroying the idols; and those prophecies came to support him in his endeavor.

The prophecies started by words of encouragement addressed by the Lord to His people, representing the bride betrothed to Him; whose kindness of her youth He will never forget, when she went after Him in the wilderness (Jeremiah 2: 1-2); and that God looks at Israel being *“holiness to the Lord”* ((Jeremiah 2: 3).

Whereas in His admonition, he made the following issues clear:

- a- While no nation has ever changed her gods, Israel kept on changing her true God , who loves and works to the account of His people, for dead idols, “they changed their glory for what does not profit: (Jeremiah 2: 11)
- b- His people committed two evils: the first is that *“they have forsaken Him, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water”* (Jeremiah 2: 13)

Perceiving the extent of corruption in which Judah lives, on the level of the royal palace, the rulers of the State, and the religious leaders, Josiah started to seek the God of his father David; he sought Him in an early age; for *“those who seek God diligently will find Him”* (Proverb 8: 17).. He could not start his reform earlier than the twelfth year of his reign, until he reached the age of twenty years old, when the guardianship was lifted from him, and he started to reign on his own. It is therefore befitting of the youth to seek the Lord in the earliest age they can.

If king Manasseh removed the idols; Josiah went further to break them to pieces, crushing them and scattering their dust over the graves of those who worshipped them; to wipe out any traces of them.; and to let everyone perceive that those who sacrifice to the idols will only have their defiled dust as a reward.

“They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which were above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them” (4)

As many times the altars of the Baal were destroyed, with the apostasy of a king to idol-worship, he, unfortunately would find among the religious, the civil leaders, and the people, a strong and fervent desire to build more pagan altars, and to re-erect wooden and carved images.

Josiah did not cast the idols outside the city as his grandfather Manasseh has done when he repented; but went further to break them into pieces and to crush them to dust. By his zeal, he had an impact, not only on Judah and Jerusalem, but even on other cities in Israel.

“He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem” (5) (and 2 kings 22: 5)

“And so he did in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, as far as Naphtali and all around with axes” (6)

Josiah's reform had their impact, not only on Judah, but even upon the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, up to Naphtali; all of which were affiliated to Israel.

Whenever a believer serves his God with faithfulness and the purity of heart, the Spirit of the Lord will work to draw even those with whom he has no relationship, to return to the Lord. Yes indeed, the divine truth has its own attraction in those who work with the Spirit, to work through them in the life of others. That motivates us to enter to the depth in our relationship with God, and in our prayers for the sake of the salvation of the world, even concerning the oppressors of the evangelic truth and the church.

“When he had broken down the altars and the wooden images, had beaten the carved images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem” (7)

3- Josiah's care to repair the temple:

“Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, Masseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to the repair the house of the Lord his God” (8)

The negative aspect of purging the house of the Lord of the abominations that were in it, and removing and crushing the evil, but went further to the positive aspect of repairing the temple to start practicing the true worship. At the beginning of the repair, he started to seek the God of his father David (3); And

now, having removed all traces of idol-worship, and started on the positive repair, he felt the personal relationship between God and him, to call God "*The Lord his God*" (8).

The recorder", whose task was not just to record the current events, but he was a high-ranking officer, responsible for the royal court; and a counselor of the king. In the days of David, the recorder was mentioned together with the chief of the army (2 Samuel 8: 16; 20: 24; 1 chronicles 18: 15). And in the reign of Hezekiah, the recorder, with the officer of the royal household and the scribe represented the king (2 kings 18: 18, 37). Here we see him, together with the governor of the city, entrusted with the repair of the house of the Lord. Which indicates his exalted position.

"When they came to Hilkiah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites who kept the doors had gathered from the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, from all the remnant of Israel, from all Judah and Benjamin, and which they had brought back to Jerusalem" (9)

The king started the work, the Levites collected silver from the people, then delivered it to Hilkiah the high priest, to spend on the movement of repair (10-11). The successful leader is the one who let all partake of the task, and who does not concentrate it in himself alone.. (Some have immigrated from Manasseh, Ephraim, and the rest of the tribes in the North, to reside in Judah).

"Then they put it in the hand of the workmen who had the oversight of the house of the Lord, to repair and restore the house" (10)

One faithful man – king Josiah – could give the chance to a multitude of people to reveal what lie in their hearts of the spirit of faithfulness and the fervent desire to work to the account of God. He did not work alone, but sent the Levites to

motivate the people to contribute to the task of repairing the house of the Lord. The Levites delivered what they collected to three officers (8), who, in turn delivered them to the high priest (9), to give to the agents and the laborers, who were all faithful and diligent (12).

By ***the houses***, he means the rooms that surrounded the temple on three sides (1 kings 6: 5), or the outer buildings annexed to the courts.

And by ***the kings of Judah*** he means Manasseh and Amon.

“They gave it to the craftsmen and builders to buy hewn stone and timber for beams, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed” (11)

We may look at the person of Josiah as a practical role model of the successful leader:

- a- The success or the authority of a good living leader do not depend upon his age; for Josiah sat on the throne while he was eight years old (1), and purged Jerusalem and Judah when he reached twenty years of age (3). He surely found resistance from the multitudes of idol-worshippers on the high places, who were attached to the carved images and the sacred pillars, beside the multitudes of the pagan priests, their families, and all those who had material benefits from that worship, or admired the marksmanship of the carved images and the sacred pillars
- b- This child who became a king was born to an evil father (Amon) of an evil grandfather (Manasseh); who although repented at the end of his life, yet he reigned for fifty-five years, during which he corrupted all the land of Judah. This boy was raised in a royal palace full of abominations, among corrupt statesmen and those of the royal court; Yet his mother, no doubt had an influence on him to protect him from such a corrupt atmosphere all around him.

- c- A secret of the success of Josiah is that he did not concentrate the reform in his hand alone, but managed to create serious leaderships from among the priests, the Levites, the leaders, and the people; even among the laborers: the masons and the carpenters. The success of a leader is to engage all the energies for the work, and to guide them with no dictatorship (8-13).
- d- Attaching himself to the law, or to the divine commandments, committing himself to it, and exhorting all to imitate him in making a covenant with the Lord (14-21).
- e- In genuine humility, he sought the counsel of the (men) of God, like 'Huldah' the prophetess (22).
- f- Stirring up the spiritual joy; by celebrating the Feast of Passover, "*There has been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet*" (35: 18); brought forth the spirit of hope..

"And the men did the work faithfully. Their overseers were Jahath and Obadiah the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to supervise. Others of the Levites, all of whom were skillful with instruments of music" (12)

The book of the chronicles exclusively talked about the care of Levites, concerning their financial supervision of the repair of the temple (11-13); such a care that led to the discovery of the book of the law of the Lord.

Do not marvel in how the author binds between the faithfulness of the masons, the carpenters and others in their work, and saying: "*Others of the Levites , all of whom were skilled with instruments of music*" (12); For those men probably contributed to the work by playing music and singing praise, by which they created an atmosphere of joy and gladness. For the joy is the healthy feature of the spiritual congregation, that support the hands to do the serious work with

spirituality and faithfulness to the account of the heavenly King. And the way the joy in the Lord supports the soul in her strive, too much sorrow, on the other hand, would destroy the soul, by bringing forth a state of despair that corrupts the mind.

- + *“Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, ... Praise the Lord with the harp; ... Play skillfully with a shout of joy”* (Psalm 33: 1, 2). Like committed soldiers, who, prevailing upon their enemies, raised their voices with shouts of joy. He said: *“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16: 33).. Who can fight against the devil without hiding in the shadow of His Mighty divine Leader? In the fullness of hope in Him, we prevail upon our enemy and slay him with our arrows.
Shouting is a cry-out not uttered by words, made by all warriors by one soul, bound together by the bond of love.

- + Too much sorrow would probably become a source of sin; for it corrupts the mind, causes confusion, and may bring forth thoughts of denial

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Saying: *“Rejoice in the Lord, O righteous”*. He truly adds *“in the Lord”*, and not according to the world; for that would not be true joy.

- + Too much sorrow is a horrible feeling which would bring forth death; hence Paul says to the Corinthians: *“lest perhaps such one be swallowed up with too much sorrow”* (2 Corinthians 2: 7)

- + The devil can destroy even under the pretence of godliness; he can destroy, not only by leading one to adultery, but, on the contrary, through

too much sorrow, that makes despair follow repentance.... He fights us by our own weapons, rather than by his.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Were over the burden-bearers and were overseers of all who did work in any kind of service. And some of the Levites were scribes, officers, and gatekeepers” (13)

A magnificent portrait of the collective work, with love, and mutual respect. Each one works according to his own talent, cherishes his role, and serves the others with love, for the edification of the church of God and His holy glory, in the following way:

- a- The king leads the movement of repair
- b- The Levites collect the silver to the account of the temple.
- c- The people generously give.
- d- The high priest receives the gifts to pay the laborers
- e- The masons, the carpenters, and the burden-bearers work with faithfulness
- f- The supervisors control the work with a spirit of love
- g- The Levites by playing music and singing praise , create an atmosphere of spiritual joy.

The word “scribes” here, refers to a group of Levites, appointed by king Hezekiah to keep the Scriptures of the law and the prophecies;

4- THE DISCOVERY OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE:

“Now when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses” (14)

Starting the work, the high priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses, in the house of the Lord; he found the fountain that floods with the heavenly comfort; he found the book of the law that was lost for so long because of the negligence of the kings, and their lack of care for the fellowship with God. Finding that copy had its impact upon the king, the statesmen, the leaders, and the people; and created an atmosphere of joy and exultation that prevailed upon the whole kingdom.

Is it not befitting of us to give thanks to the Lord and praise Him; because the Holy Book became now available for everyone, and the Word of God is no more rare?! What excuse can we present if we neglect the enjoyment of the Word of the Lord?!; .

“Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord’. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan” (15)

“So Shaphan carried the book to the king, bringing the king word, saying, ‘All that was committed to your servants they are doing’” (16)

“And they have gathered the money that was found in the house of the Lord, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen” (17)

“Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, ‘Hilkiah the priest has given me a book’, and Shaphan read it before the king” (18)

“Now it happened when the king heard the words of the Law that he tore his clothes” (19)

The king and the people were terrified by finding the Book of the Law of the Lord, for perceiving that they have broken some of the statutes, and that his reforms will not be an excuse for him. As it was probably the first time for Josiah to hear the Word of the Lord, he tore his clothes (19), and exulted in the Lord his God (27). ... It is befitting of us to **rend** our hearts rather than our clothes.

In humility and contrition of spirit the king tore his royal attire; and sent to inquire from the Lord for him, about what he should do, so that the wrath of the Lord would be lifted up, not only from his person, his household, and his nation, but even from Israel for its dissention from the kingdom.

“Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, an Asaiah a servant of the king, saying” (20)

“Go, inquire from the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book” (21)

The king was not ashamed to demand from the priest and the scribe and others to inquire from the Lord about what he should do. ... In the Book of Acts the listeners to the Word of the Lord inquired from the apostles: *“Men and brethren, what shall we do!”* (Acts 2: 37). And with the same spirit, the keeper of the prison, where Paul and Silas were put, said to them: *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16: 30). And in Isaiah it was written: *“If you inquire, inquire”* (Isaiah 21: 12).

Feeling committed to care for the ten tribes, as well as for those of Judah and Benjamin, the service of Josiah embraced all tribes; for he was preoccupied with the salvation of all, and their return to God. As for the Christian, it is befitting

of him, being attached to the Savior, the Lover of mankind, to have his heart wide with love for all humanity, desiring the salvation of all.

- + To approach the Lord with one soul, and with repentance, would be well received by Him rather than all offerings; as for Him there is nothing more exalted than the human soul; for everything in the world will eventually go away, except for the immortal soul..

(St. John El-Dargi)

- + If you see a donkey fallen in a pit, you would hasten to help it out without inquiring about his owner. Is it not more so concerning a fallen man?! For he belongs to God, even if he is a non-believer or even an idol-worshipper; as long as he needs help.
- + If you see a blind man about to fall into a pit; will you not hasten to stretch your hand to support him, and keep him from falling?1 How then could we see our fallen brethren, about to fall into the eternal pit of Hades, and would not stretch our hand to help them?!
- + If he is a Greek (a Gentile); let us wail on him; for the cross for him is ignorance, even though it is God's wisdom and power.
- + Let us wail on them, for they do not know their salvation. A woman's love for man, is not as strong as our love to bring all forth to salvation.
- + We should show the brotherly love, the head of virtues, without which no one will be saved, toward the children of our nature... Therefore, beloved, do not hesitate to counsel your brother; even if he reviles you and threaten you with harm. Show him compassion and longsuffering t comfort him.

And if he goes too far in his animosity, rejoice, for so did your Lord Jesus Christ; for whom the soul is very precious, that nothing in the world would equal; and for whom the return of one soul to the way of truth is better than tens of thousands of offerings you may give.

If you see someone in need of spiritual or physical healing, do not say to yourself: that is not my job; it is for the priest or the minister to save him of his evil and heal him; I am just a regular man with a wife and kids, and this is the job of the priests and the monks.

Now tell me, If you happen to find a vessel full of gold, will you say to yourself: To whom shall I give? Or will you hasten like a ravenous wolf and snatch it before anyone else does?! ... Let such kind of longing be yours toward your fallen brethren; putting in your heart and mind that you have found a very precious treasure, namely to care for the salvation of your brother. For the Lord says on the tongue of His apostle: *“He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul”* (James 5: 20).

(St. John Chrysostom)

“So Hilkiah and those whom the king had appointed went to Huldah the prophetess the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe (she dwelt in Jerusalem in the second quarter), and they spoke to her to that effect” (22)

Hilkiah did not seek the counsel of the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah who were close to the king (Zephaniah 1: 1), probably because Jeremiah was not in Jerusalem at that time, but in the village of his family (Anathoth); and Zephaniah was probably out of the city. That is why the delegation sent by the king went to

Huldah the prophetess and widow, who was mentioned by the Holy Book among others women, like Miriam the sister of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15: 20). Deborah the judge and prophetess (Judges 4: 4), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6: 14), the wife of Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 8: 3), Anna (Luke 2: 36), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21: 8-9).

“Then she answered them, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to Me’” (23)

Holdah’s talk with the delegation of the king could be divided into two parts:

- a- The first part is directed to Josiah as any man among the children of Israel before the law of God:[As he humbled himself before God, He will gather him to his fathers in peace, and he shall not see all the calamity which God will bring on this place and its inhabitants..
- b- The second part is directed to Josiah as the king of Judah responsible for all the nations: [As the cup of evil of that nation was full, a bitter chastisement will dwell upon it after the departure of the good king].

“Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place, and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah’” (24)

“Because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place and not be quenched” (25)

Holdah the prophetess confirmed to them that, because the cup of evil of Judah is already full, the divine chastisement will dwell on Judah as well as on Israel, Yet not in the days of Josiah.

And because Josiah was still a young man, the people assumed that the chastisement will not be before a long time to come; not perceiving that he will die young, in his thirty years of age.

The king persisted on his humility, and continued to read the law of God in the presence of the leaders and all those present; he did not hide the seriousness of the situation from them, lest they might slothfully delay their repentance.

“And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire from the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Concerning the words that you have heard’” (26)

“Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God, when you heard His words against this place, and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me,

and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you’. Says the Lord” (27)

“Surely I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I bring on this place and its inhabitants’. So

they brought back word to the king” (28)

Although Josiah prayed to the Lord to lift His wrath from the whole people, yet because their sin was deeply rooted in them, and they bore inside them a hidden stubbornness, God granted Josiah a special blessing; saying: “I shall gather you to your fathers in peace ...” (38). And his eyes will not see all the calamity God will bring on this place and its inhabitants, because of the persistence of the leaders and the people to resume evil and corruption after his death.

6- READING THE BOOK OF THE LAW OF GOD IN A PUBLIC ASSEMBLY:

“Then the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem” (29)

After hearing the law and the message of God on the tongue of Holdah the prophetess, Josiah did not despair nor became slothful, but called all the leaders and the people, old and young, rich and poor; and the king stood to read the law by himself. Having been very emotional, he had a strong impact upon his listeners.

“And the king went out to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the priests and the Levites, and all the people, great and small; and he read in their hearing all the word of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord” (30)

“all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem”, the old and the young. For the king perceived that the house of the Lord should be open before all; and that making a covenant with the Lord has to be the commitment of the great and the small. The Word of God is active in the life of all, presented not to a specific age, but to the child as well as to the elder, to man and to woman, . The king intended to let all the people enjoy the law of the Lord, being the riches of the soul, and its support during its sojourn in this world, to be filled with hope and true joy, together with inner peace.

+ The people that walked in crooked ways before receiving faith; how could they correct their way, except by keeping the words of the Lord?!

+ As by mentioning the name of the Lord, we flee from the tricks of Satan;
And as I have dedicated to You, O my God, my whole mind and perception,
hence I am not worthy of staying out of Your commandments..

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

*“Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the
Lord, to follow the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His
testimonies, and His statutes with all his heart,
and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were
written in this book” (31)*

Before demanding from the people to make a covenant with God, he himself
made a covenant on the podium, to keep the commandments of God with all his

heart and all his soul according to what is written in the book, whatever the troubles he may face.

- + Who are those who do not keep your covenant, but those who went astray from the testimonies of God, and did not endure the troubles caused by their many persecutors?. Now, whoever keeps the covenant will be crowned. Seeing those who cannot endure the persecution, perverting from the testimonies of God, the psalmist grieved because he loved them. Jealousy is good if it comes out of love and not from envy. Concerning those who failed to keep the covenant, he added, "*For they did not keep Your sayings*"; for they became deniers in their afflictions.

(St. Augustine)

"And he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take their stand for it. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers" (32)

Making a covenant with God, the king demanded from all present to stand in the fear of God while he read the items of the covenant, to testify to it, and to pledge keeping it with all faithfulness..

When the new generation of the children of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land under the leadership of Joshua the son of Nun, the prophet Moses renewed the covenant before his departure, as it so came in the book of Deuteronomy. And in two occasions Joshua renewed the covenant with God (Joshua 8: 34 etc.; Joshua 24). So did the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 7: 2 etc.; 1 Samuel 12); And after Nehemiah rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem, "*While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and bowing down before the house of God; a*

very large congregation of men, women, and children assembled to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly” (Ezra 10: 1).

It so befitting of the church of God in every land to perpetually assemble to renew its covenant with its Savior under the guidance of His Holy Spirit, given to her on the day of the Pentecost, who dwelt in us in the sacraments of baptism and Meron; to live by the Truth as the body of Christ by walking in the Spirit.

“Thus Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country that belonged to the children of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God.

All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers” (33)

Although the king had his influence on his people, being a role model to them, who knew how to gain them to the Lord, not by strict orders, but by love, that they did not go astray from behind the Lord God of their fathers all the days of his life; Yet their hearts were drawn to idol-worship and to the their abominations. Many them many did not return to God with their whole heart, but in pretence (Jeremiah 6 – 10); and in his days it was said about Judah: *“Backsliding, Israel committed adultery”* (Jeremiah 3: 8). *“From the twenty-third year in which the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, they provoke God to anger with the works of their hands”* (Jeremiah 25: 3-7).

Josiah was faithful in his relationship with God; but the common people, despite their response to his reforms, yet their hearts were not completely upright. Every reform needs the Spirit of God to move the heart, and to raise it as though to heaven, to find true sweetness in the fellowship with God.

With what the great king Josiah did, he was a role model for any leader in the church, to offer repentance and renewal of the covenant with the Lord Jesus, and

to stir up all around him to true repentance; whether this leader is a bishop, a priest, a deacon, a male or female minister in the church education, or the youth meetings; or a head of a household. Let us then start by ourselves as the godly king Josiah started by himself, before calling his people to repent and to return to God, back from all abominations in which they have fallen..

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 34

SEND, O HOLY ONE, SHEPHERDS ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN HEART

+ My soul exults in Your amazing work, O Good Shepherd;
You sent Josiah to sit on the throne when he was just eight years old;
How did he shepherd Your people with uprightness, while still just a little kid?

Who can believe that he was the son of the evil Amon, and the grandson of the evil Manasseh?

I wonder who has moved his heart to uprightness since his childhood?

It is your amazing grace, and love for Your people, that sent to them such an upright king.

+ I wonder how that good shepherd lived all his days in uprightness;
In his days, the prophet Jeremiah did not stop weeping;
Because corruption reached even to Your holy temple;
In his youth, he purged Judah and Jerusalem;
He removed all the high places with the sacred pillars and the wooden images.;

And he repaired Your house to restore worship for You.

- + You sent him in the midst of the darkness to bear Your lamp;
He moved strongly in joyful hope;
He led, by himself the movement of reform, and continued without despair;
His zeal, wisdom, godliness, and abidance to You, motivated the others to follow lead;.
Your grace drew many around him to work with him;
The people gave generously to the temple;
With a holy zeal the Levites collected the silver to the account of the temple;
The high priest received the gifts to spend on the repair;
The hearts of the masons, the carpenters, and even the burden-bearers flare to work with faithfulness;
The choir of the Levites stood praising you as though in heaven;
None of them was in need for someone to push him to work;
For Your amazing grace working in Josiah worked in all.

- + Send us, O Lord, shepherds like Josiah; who was not preoccupied with running the affairs of the kingdom;
Nor with the repair of the temple, at the expense of Your holy law;
The king bowed his head in fear to listen to the law;
With humility and contrite heart, he tore his clothes;
He demanded from all to pray for him.

- + How amazing was the heart of that king!
Who demanded praying for his own sake as a sinner;
And for the sake of all the tribes;
With a wide heart, he sought the salvation of all, even of the tribes that previously dissented;

- + With humility he sent delegates to inquire from Holdah the prophetess;

He ascended to the house of the Lord, together with all the men of Judah,
the priests, the Levites, and the people;

He stood on the podium to make a covenant with God;

And demanded from all present to stand with the fear of God;

+ Behold, the harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few;

Send, O Lord, laborers who walk in Your way without perversion;

You are the One who searches the hearts, and who grants love by Your
grace;

You are the Good Shepherd who works through those whom You send;

Send, O Holy One, in all generations, shepherds according to Your heart.

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CHAPTER 35

JOSIAH AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER

A good beginning and a sorrowful end:

The Holy Book presents to us a warning lest we begin well and do not finish; when we withdraw our hand from that of God, when we give him the back and not the face, and when fall into evil or stubbornness with the Lord, even for some time. The following is a parade of some of the kings of Judah (the Southern kingdom) who began well, and was not able to finish

- a- **Asa**: He did what is right and upright in the sight of the Lord (1 kings 15: 11; 2 Chronicles 14: 2). But in his last days, he trusted in the king of Aram, and sought his help against Israel (2 Chronicles 16: 4), and did not seek the counsel of God.
- b- **Jehoshaphat** (1 kings 22: 43), He did wrong by giving his son in marriage to the daughter of the evil king Ahab of Israel; and by going with him to war (2 Chronicles 19: 2-3)
- c- **Joash (or Jehoash)** (2 Chronicles 24: 2). He did what is right in the days of Jehoiada the godly high priest; but once that priest died, he walked according to the counsel of the wicked leaders of Judah who deceived him to forsake the worship of the living God; and when Zechariah the son of Jehoiada rebuked him, he gave order to stone him to death. Then two persons who most probably lived in his palace assassinated him (2 Chronicles 24: 26)

- d- Amaziah** (2 Chronicles 25: 1). He started by obeying the Lord; but apostatized to worship the idols of Edom; and when he haughtily challenged the king of Israel, he was killed in Lechish (2 Chronicles 25: 27)
- e- Uzziah** Starting by an upright life, and ending by haughtiness, and forcing himself upon the task of priesthood, he was afflicted by leprosy, and spent his last days in the house of sickness; and his son sat on his throne (2 Chronicles 26).
- f- Hezekiah**, The amazing man of reform; Yet at the end of his days he foolishly boasted his riches before the ambassadors sent by the king of Babylon, instead of giving glory to the Lord; for which the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to rebuke him (2 Chronicles 29-32).
- g- Josiah**; The zealous man of reform. But unfortunately, he interfered into what does not concern him, in a battle against Necho the king of Egypt, who moved when he heard about the defeat of Assyria before the Babylonians. And he was wounded in the battle of Carchemish and died (2 Chronicles 35: 23).

The celebration of Passover:

This chapter presents to us a new page of the reforms done by king Josiah, namely keeping of the Passover of the Lord, celebrating it in such a magnificent way not done since the days of the prophet Samuel. This celebration raises in our minds the following questions:

- 1- Who exhorted the king to do such a joyful work? Was it his mother who wished for him to follow the lead of his grandfather king Hezekiah, the amazing man of reform, Whom he imitated in purging the land of the idols and their abominations, and in caring for the worship of the living God?.. ... Or has he, having studied the law, perceived the importance of celebrating the Passover? ... What were his motives for exerting so much

- effort to celebrate it? ... Did he intend to walk according to the law which he loved with his whole heart, and found his happiness in obeying it, and in the attachment to God:?
- 2- Was his soul bitter concerning the miserable condition that prevailed upon the land because its perversion from God the Source of happiness, in the eras of his grandfather Manasseh, and his father Amon, to desire to bring all back to God the Source of Joy?
 - 3- Did he perceive that the sacrifice of Passover will gather all the tribes together in the Spirit of love, unity, and the return to God?

Anyway , celebrating the Passover showed his personality as a living leader, who followed the lead of king Hezekiah, and together with him, they walked according to the way of their father David, a role model of the king leader.

We have already talked about keeping the Passover in our concise commentary on the second book of the kings, (2 kings 23: 21-22); which took place in Jerusalem in the same year the book of the law was discovered. Here we shall deal with it in more detail.

The two reformer kings Hezekiah and Josiah celebrated the Passover as an essential part in the worship of the living God, and the greatest of the Jewish Feasts. In the second book of the kings it was said: "*Such a Passover has never been held since the days of the judges*" (2 kings 23: 22)

- 1- Josiah's care to celebrate the Passover
1 - 19
- 2- Josiah enters into a battle against the Pharaoh of Egypt
20 - 23
- 3- Josiah's death and how he was mourned by all Judah and Jerusalem
24 - 27

1- JOSIAH'S CARE TO CELEBRATE THE PASSOVER:

“Now Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover lambs on the fourteenth day of the first month”

(1)

All the Feasts that came in the Old Testament, whether the weekly (the Sabbath), the monthly, or the annual (Leviticus 22); had their spiritual significance, symbolizing the salvation work of the Lord Christ through His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension up to heaven. The Passover, had its specific importance in that in it the Jews remember how God set them free from the bondage of Pharaoh (the symbol of the devil), to head to Mount Sinai to receive the law, and to set the tabernacle of meeting (as a symbol of setting forth to the heavenly Canaan). In this Feast the people remember that they are chosen by God to enjoy having a covenant with Him, and to enjoy the eternal glories.

According to St. John Chrysostom, the Christian Feast of Passover is a daily Feast in the life of the believer who is spiritually enflamed; It is the Feast of the continuous setting forth to the deposit of the heavenly life..

The celebration of the Passover, this time was done on the fourteenth day of the first month, exactly according to the law, and not of the second month like that done by Hezekiah; on account of that the priests and the Levites prepared themselves and were sanctified for the Lord. Yet the difference between the two celebrations is that in that of Hezekiah, the people partook of it with great zeal and godliness; something that is lacking here; for the people, in their celebration now are just going along with their king (17-18). They are *“having a form of godliness, but denying its power”* (2 Timothy 3: 5). But we may say that the leaders and the ministers, on their side, gave some kind of care to make sure

that the celebration is consummated with the necessary reverence, to make up for the lack of zeal among the common people.

- + It is a Feast all the days of our life. He did not say: “**Keep the Feast**”, concerning the Passover or the Pentecost; but refers to that, for us Christians, all the time is a Feast, because of the exaltation of the good things we receive... It is a feast that extends all our time on earth; hence the apostle Paul says: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; Again I will say: rejoice*” (Philippians 4: 4). As in the Feast no one puts on filthy clothes; I wish we do that as well.. For in us the spiritual matrimony is realized; for He says: “*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son*” (Matthew 22: 2).

- + As the Jews often used to forget God’s goodness on them, God bound between His goodness and material things, not only with a certain time, but with their regular life activities like eating for example. That is why they ate the Passover “*with their loins girded and their sandals on their feet*” (Exodus 12: 11) and if they are asked for a reason, they would say: we were ready to start on our journey out of Egypt to the promised land; ready for our exodus. That is then the historical symbolism; but as far as we Christians are concerned, we eat our Passover – Christ – who is slain for our sake; the same way; to be, as well, ready for our own exodus – our departure from this world.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“And he set the priests in their duties and encouraged them for the service of the house of the Lord” (2)

The king encouraged and guided the priests and the Levites to do their duties; the way the apostle Paul did, who wrote: “*Say to Archippus, ‘take heed to the*

ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it” (Colossians 4: 17).

The king here did not force himself upon the task of priesthood as king Saul did by offering a sacrifice when the prophet Samuel was late in coming; but he exhorted all to work and guided them according to what came in the law (6)

“Then he said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who were holy to the Lord: ‘Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel, built. It shall no longer be a burden on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and His people Israel” (3)

Once again the Levites, by a command from the king, put the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy place. For it might have been moved from its place by king Amon; or have been hidden by some priests from the face of that king; or during the work of repair and construction in the days of king Josiah.

By saying: *“It shall no longer be a burden on your shoulders”*; he sought to set the ark for good as a sign of the divine presence in the Most Holy Place in the house of the Lord, after all the idols and the pagan abominations were removed ... After that the Levites would concentrate their effort on the ministry of God offering the sacrifices etc.) and teaching the people.

And by saying: *“Now serve the Lord your God and His people Israel”*, he confirms their role as leaders who exult in the ministry of God and His people, and not through His authority on them and giving them orders (2 Corinthians 4: 5). This expression, as well, bears some kind of a change in the ministry of the Levites, as they did the following:

- a- Taking their position in the sanctuary, they slaughtered the Passover and prepared for their brethren
- b- They were at the service of the priests;
- c- They separated the burnt offerings, grilled the Passover with fire, and cooked the peace offerings for the people;
- d- They set their portions and those of the priests, the sons of Aaron;
- e- They cared to execute all what came in the book of the law; particularly the praise by the divisions of the singers; and organizing the worship in the house of the Lord.

“Prepare yourselves according to your fathers’ houses, according to your divisions, following the written instructions of David king of Israel and the written instruction of Solomon his son” (4)

“According to your divisions”, He did not set a new system, nor changed the rite, but sought from them to do everything in order, everyone according to his own talents, and according to what came in the law of Moses, and to the instructions of David and Solomon (4).

He assigned a certain group to serve every tribe coming to the celebration, so that all the tribes would feel that they are cared for by the Levites..

“And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the fathers’ houses of your brethren the lay people, and according to the division of the fathers’ house of the Levite” (5)

“So slaughter the Passover offerings, sanctify yourselves, and prepare them for your brethren, that they may be according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses” (6)

The king perceived that the Levites would not be able to serve the people of God, unless they offer the Passover, namely through the cross, the Granter of the

crossover from the bondage to the glorious liberty of the children of God ; and be sanctified (6)

As many were ignorant of what is written in the law concerning the celebration of the Feast of the Passover, and the role of the people in offering the lamb of the Passover; it was the duty of the Levites to educate the people to behave with wisdom according to what came in the law.

“Then Josiah gave the lay people lambs and young goats from the flock, all for Passover offerings for all who were present, to the number of thirty thousand, as well as three thousand cattle; these were from the king’s possessions” (7)

The king initiated by giving abundantly from his own possessions to the people of God, to let them partake of his celebration of the holy Feast. The king and the leaders who followed his lead, taking upon themselves much of the expenses of the celebration; for the people were unable to give, and their zeal was not big enough for doing it, they gave the following:

The king gave 30,000 sheep and lambs, and 3,000 cattle from his own purse (7).

The rulers gave 2600 lambs, and 300 cattle (8)

The chiefs of the Levites gave 5000 lambs, and 500 cattle (9)

“And his leaders gave willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites, .Hikliah, Zechariah, and Jahiel, rulers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings two thousand six hundred from the flock, and three hundred cattle” (8)

Having, himself, experienced the blessing of giving, the king’s care to give from his own purse, to celebrate the Feast in a unique way, revealed what was in his

heart concerning the poor. He exhorted the rulers, the priests, and the Levites, to follow his lead, to give abundantly with generosity and joy; and to partake of the blessing to give the needy people, as well as the needy priests and the Levites.

+ (If everyone of us took only what he needs, and gave the rest to the needy, there will be no rich and poor.

+ Those who love their neighbor like they love themselves, would not attempt to possess more than he does; and would yet feel that he possesses plenty.

How could this be realized except by enjoying the comforts of the others; The more wealth you possess, the less you will be able to love; If you truly love your neighbor, it was befitting of you to get rid, since a long time, of this wealth; but now, as it became a part of you more so than the members of your own body, the deprivation of it became more difficult and painful than cutting off a member of your body.

Did you give clothes to the naked, and bread to the hungry? Did you open your door before the stranger? Have you been a father (or a mother) to the orphan? Did you consider the sufferings of the others as your own sufferings?... What wealth will you be sorry to leave behind after your departure from this world? If you have put in your heart since a long time to give the needy; how could you then not endure to distribute what is left of it with you?

Men do not hesitate to spend much to prepare for the requirements of the feast, yet they feel sorry to leave behind the gold and silver and possessions, namely the stones and dust, to acquire the blessed life.

+ When wealth is distributed the way our Lord directs us to do by nature, it will come back to us; On the contrary if we store it in a storehouse, it will corrupt.... If you attempt to keep it you will lose it, and if you distribute

it you will keep it. *“He has dispersed abroad; He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever”* (Psalm 112: 9)..

+ As much as you love wealth, be careful not to let any of your possessions be lost; Make everything truly yours, ... do not leave any of your wealth to the strangers; ... transfer everything to the eternal life.

Prepare by yourself ahead for your own funeral; the works of godliness are the best shroud; ... On your departure be clothed in the superb attires of your good works.Turn your wealth into a true adornment that does not separate from you. ... Keep everything with you when you depart. In all that, follow the lead of Christ, the Good Counselor who loves you; He who became poor for our sake to make us rich by His poverty (2 Corinthians 8: 9); who delivered Himself a redemption for all (1 Timothy 2: 6); ... Let us imitate Him, for He is wise, knows everything; Let us wait for Him, for He loves us; ... Let us give Him for His gifts; for He is the Giver to us.

Anyway, let us practice what He commands, to become heirs of the eternal life in Christ Himself, to whom is the glory, and the authority forever, Amen.

“also Conaniah, his brothers Shemaiah and Nethaneel, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Josabad, chief of the Levites, gave to the Levites for Passover offerings five thousand from the flock and five hundred cattle” (9)

“So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their places, and the Levites in their divisions, according to the king’s command” (10)

The king assigned trustworthy Levites to prepare for the celebration of the Feast; to slaughter the lambs of the Passover (3-5); to help the priests, to sing praise, and to guard the gates (10-15). The priests and the Levites did the rites of the celebration of the Passover according to the commands of the king, and to the requirements of the law; in a magnificent portrait of collective work, with the spirit of love, joy, and exultation. The priests and the Levites slaughtered the lambs of the Passover in the temple, and the priests sprinkled the blood on the altar. The Levites skinned the sacrifices, grilled specific parts of them, and offered them to the people according to their fathers’ houses. And boiled the thanksgiving sacrifices in pots and in caldrons (13)

“And they slaughtered the Passover offerings; and the priests sprinkled the blood with their hands, while the Levites skinned the animals” (11)

The people also used to slaughter the lamb of Passover, give the blood to the priests to sprinkle before the altar; and to the Levites to skin and prepare to salt the flesh. The Levites, as well prepared the food for the priests, who were all day busy with the altar.

“Then they removed the burnt offerings that they might give them to the divisions of the fathers’ houses of the lay people, to offer to the Lord, as it is written in the book of Moses. And so they did with the cattle” (12)

Josiah called the remnants in the kingdom of Israel to partake of the celebration, as king Hezekiah previously did; on account of that the celebration this time was not like any other regular feast; but was unique, and gathered all Israel in unity and love.

From the lambs of the Passover they separated the parts to be burnt on the altar, gave them to those who offered the sacrifices to deliver to the priests to sanctify and raise on the altar.

“Also they roasted the Passover offerings with fire according to the ordinance; but the other holy offerings they boiled in pots, in caldrons, and in pans, and divided them quickly among all the lay people” (13)

The flesh of the Passover was to be roasted with fire; but that of the sin offerings was to be broiled in pots.

“Then afterward they prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron were busy in offering burnt offerings and fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron” (14)

“And the singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their places, according to the command of David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun the king’s seers. Also the gatekeepers were at each

gate, they did not have to leave their positions, because their brethren the Levites prepared portions for them” (15)

As the praise was a living part of the worship, particularly in the celebration of the Feast, the singers, the sons of Asaph sang, together with Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, the seer; giving the celebration an atmosphere of joy and gladness. As the singers practiced their role, playing the joyful songs, and the gatekeepers had to stay in their assigned locations to guard the gates, and to keep anything defiled or unclean from getting into the temple; the Levites used to bring over to them their portion of the lambs. The spiritual joy, therefore, mixed with the holy life.

“So all the service of the Lord was prepared the same day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord, according to the command of king Josiah” (16)

By saying “*the same day*”, is meant, not just the day of the Passover, but all along the following seven days.

“And the children of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days” (17)

“There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests

and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (18)

The celebration was a liturgical work counted as great as in the days of the prophet Samuel because of the fiery heart of Josiah, despite the lukewarm hearts of the people. Every minister did his role with all strength, zeal, and joy. Although Josiah was not as rich as David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah were, yet

there was no atmosphere of the celebration as joyful as this one since the days of the prophet Samuel, in which the king contributed with his spirit, and zeal, and from his own purse. .

“In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept” (19)

Those who celebrated the Feast felt, not that they practice a work by which to remember what happened in the past, but that they enjoy God the Savior of the people in the land of Egypt, perpetually, and everywhere; a symbol of what the Lord Christ has done, and what the church inherited to live with; as according to the apostle Paul: *“For indeed Christ our Passover, was sacrificed for us”* (1 Corinthians 5: 7).

2- JOSIAH ENTERS INTO A BATTLE AGAINST THE PHARAOH OF EGYPT:

The fall of Nineveh the capital of Assyria before the Babylonians was not good news to Necho (510 – 594) the new king of Egypt, for, perceiving that the Babylonians after defeating the Assyrians, will definitely go after Egypt; he therefore took his forces to the Euphrates to confront their anticipated movement toward him. Although he had to pass through Judah, yet he had no animosity concerning it; and it was a mistake from Josiah to enter into a battle against Necho, in which did not concern him.. Josiah probably did it for the sake of the friendship that was between his grandfather Hezekiah and Babylon (32: 31); and of that all the holy land (Israel and Judah) have suffered much from the Assyria. As the two armies confronted one another in the Valley of Armageddon, at the hill of Mageddo, Josiah was seriously wounded, and was taken to Jerusalem where he died.

“After all this, when Josiah prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates, and Josiah went out against him” (20)

Thirteen years passed since that celebration of the Feast of Passover, during which we heard nothing of importance; but according to some, the people did not forsake their sins.

“But he sent messengers to him saying, What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God who is with me, lest He destroys you” (21)

It was a serious mistake for Josiah to enter into an unwarranted battle against Necho. He did not seek the counsel of the Lord before entering into that battle; and did not listen to the messengers sent by the king of Egypt to warn him. As a godly righteous man, it was befitting of him to respect the international law, not to partake of a battle which does not concern him, and with all the glorious works he did, he should have listened to the words of God on the tongue of Necho king of Egypt, that interfering in the battles of others, and forcing oneself upon their plans, will end up in complete failure. ... It is befitting of us to seek the counsel of God who controls history, and the Higher Hand in everything happening in the world.

According to some, setting forth toward Assyria, it was not the goal of Necho to help Babylon against Assyria, for there was animosity between Egypt and Assyria; but he found in that battle between Babylon and Assyria, a chance to confront Babylon, which he believed will succeed Assyria, and stay as an enemy against Egypt. He intended to confront Babylon, not for the sake of Assyria, but for the sake of Egypt, that he expected to be attacked by Babylon after prevailing

upon Assyria. What Necho intended to do was therefore a personal thing that touches Egypt, and had nothing to do with Judah; for the armies of Egypt and Assyria used to cross from and to Syria without touching the land of Jerusalem, while crossing the coastal route.

“For God commanded me to make haste”. Although Necho was a pagan, but many of the ancient inscriptions indicate that the kings of Egypt knew somehow of the existence of an exalted Unique God; and what Necho utters here is an inspiration from that God.

“Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the valley of Megiddo” (22)

When Josiah entered that unwarranted war, God spoke to him, not through a prophet or a priest, not by a vision or in a dream, but on the tongue of a pagan king. Yet *“he did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God”*.

Josiah did not follow the lead of his father David, he did not ask God; *“Shall I go to war? Will You deliver them into my hand? ... That is why God spoke to him through that pagan king, whose utterance was a kind of prophecy which was realized.*

“And the archers shot king Josiah, and the king said to his servants, ‘Take me away, for I am severely wounded’” (23)

Josiah foolishly acted and was chastised, by being killed in his prime ; Yet God did not forget his good work and his upright heart. We do not marvel to read how the prophet Jeremiah mourned and lamented him; for, by the Spirit of prophecy Jeremiah saw what will dwell upon the people after his death.

3- JOSIAH'S DEATH, AND HOW HE WAS MOURNED BY ALL JUDAH AND JERUSALEM:

“His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem. So he died, and was buried in one of the tombs

of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah”

(24)

That second chariot was probably used in addition to the one he rode, it was not marked by any royal sign, to avoid any probable attack against it in case they had to use it as they actually did.

“Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah. And to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations. They made it a custom in Israel; and indeed

they are written in the laments” (25)

Although many of the leaders and the people of Judah resumed their evil, yet they could not cease to lament for that good king along the generations. For the holy life bears within itself a strong testimony that evil cannot deny, disregard, or oppose. We do not marvel that the prophet Jeremiah lamented for him, for he perceived that by his death the last chapter of reform in Judah came to an end; and saw by the spirit of prophecy what will dwell upon Judah of corruption after the death of that good king.

The eyes of the prophet was directed towards the Messiah (Lamentation 4: 22; 5: 19).

We marvel at how the people mourned him; but, through the proclamations of the prophet Jeremiah, they perceived that by the death of this king, the day of the anticipated bitter chastisement is close at hand; So they were mourning themselves.... But one of the reasons of that unnatural grief is that it never happened before that one of the kings of Judah fell in a battle into which he unwisely entered..

The lamentation by the prophet Jeremiah for Josiah was never found (35: 25). According to some it refers to the whole book of lamentations; and to others it is only the fourth chapter thereof alone; but according to the majority of scholars, the lamentations referred to, are lost

In the 'Tergom' it came: Jeremiah mourned Josiah by great lamentations, and all still sing them to this very day. As there is a law in Israel to mourn Josiah every year by singing the lamentations written and recorded by the scribe Baruch on the tongue of the prophet Jeremiah.

“Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his goodness, according to what was written in the Law of the Lord” (26)

“And his deeds from first to last, indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah” (27)

In the 'Tergom' it came: [The first deeds are what he did in his childhood; and the last are what he did in his youth, and all the ordinances he uttered since the eighth year, to the eighteenth year of his reign, when he started to repair the sanctuary of the Lord, and to purge it from every defilement; which are all written in the books of the kings of Israel and Judah].

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 35

**LET ME CELEBRATE THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER, AND ADORN MYSELF
WITH THE TRUE LOVE**

- + In obedience of the law, Josiah celebrated the Passover;
He presented to You obedience, love, and gifts;
He poured the spirit of joy upon the leaderships and the people;
Grant me, to celebrate You every day, O the True Passover;
You are our Passover;
Not to remember our liberation from the bondage of Pharaoh;
But, by Your cross, You grant us to destroy the devil, the enemy of
mankind;
By You, we set forth from the earth, as though to heaven itself;
By You, I shall not call all the tribes of Israel to celebrate;
But I desire that all humanity will enjoy Your salvation.
- + Count all my days as an unceasing Feast; My soul exults in Your
salvation;
And give You thanks for Your love, compassion, and care;
I shall not offer a lamb to slaughter;
But my soul will exult together with the apostle Paul who says:
*“I have been crucified with Christ; It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives
in me”* (Galatians 2: 20).
Glory be to You, O our Passover delivered for our sake;
O, Grantor of the resurrection, the eternal life, and the eternal glories.
- + By his abundant gifts, Josiah proclaimed his love;
And sought from the rich to join him in the enjoyment of the blessing of
giving;
Having tasted the sweetness of love;
He desired that all partake of his experience.

+ With order and discipline, all listened to the choir of the Levites; All counted themselves as though in heaven;

And together with their sacrifices, their thanksgiving praise was well received;

For this is according to your pleasure, that all mankind partake of the praise given by the heavenly hosts

And that all become a choir of praise, with joy and love.

+ Grant me that my body harmonizes with my soul; and my heart with my mind, in praising You;

And that Your Holy Spirit plays on the strings of my heart;

And to let my senses and emotions work together with my mind with the spirit of love;

Yes, I wish the whole world celebrate You, O our amazing Passover;

Joining heaven in exulting in You, O Savior of mankind.



CHAPTER 36

TO CAPTIVITY AND BACK

THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH:

Hezekiah purged the land of Judah from the idol-worship and its abominations brought in by his father Ahaz; ... Manasseh purged Judah after his repentance in his last days on earth, after so long in corruption; And Josiah purged it from what his father Amon did. But after Josiah the last good king, and all along twenty-two years, four evil kings came, whose rein hastened the dwelling of the prophesied harsh chastisement, the feeling of which started to dwell upon many. The collapse of Assyria and its empire, had a great impact upon the whole region; desolation gradually came upon Judah and Jerusalem; to give people a chance for repentance; for *“God has no pleasure in the death of one who dies, as much as in that he turn and live”* (Ezekiel 18: 32)..

The history of most of those kings was recorded in the second book of the kings, but here, the author made his talk very concise about that bitter period lived by the kingdom of Judah.

Actually, the complete destruction of Judah was not because of the power of the Babylonian empire, but because of the corruption of Judah, and its persistence to separate from the true God, the Source of its life. What happened to it was more like the crime of suicide, committed by those four king, together with the religious, civil authorities and the common people. For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6: 23).

Many fathers of the church, like St. Maccari the Great, confirm that sin carries its corruption within itself; for the wicked who persists on his evil will perish as a natural fruit of his wickedness leading to corruption. The wicked needs no one to punish him, for what he does will bring on him bitterness and death; he will drink from the same cup he filled for himself; unless he throws it away through repentance and the enjoyment of the fellowship with his Savior, and his strife through the holy will in the Lord..

+ Every person: Jew or Greek, rich or poor, an emperor of authority or a beggar; “*Whoever does sin is a slave of sin*” 34). If men recognize their servitude, they would be able to acquire freedom.

He who is born free, then is captivated by the Barbarians, would turn from a free man to a slave; and when someone else, having compassion on him, redeem him, and restore freedom to him.... He who is redeemed, and the redeemer should not boast, but let them both flee to the true Redeemer, who calls those under sin slaves or partly dead.

Man fears the dwelling of captivity on him through his iniquity ... Why? Because captivity makes him dead. ... By saying: “*Let the dead bury their dead*” (Matthew 8: 22), the Lord Christ means that all those under sin are dead, slaves of the dead; dead in their service, and slaves in their death.

+ It was said: “*There is a stench, for he (Lazarus) has been dead four days*” (John 11: 39). Such a condition would happen on four stages:

The first stage when the evil desire is stirred up in the heart; the second, when it is accepted; the third when it turns into action; and the fourth, when it turns into a habit,

As there are those who throw away the evil thought from their mind because they find no pleasure in them; there are, on the other hand, those who, although find pleasure, yet they do not go along with them; in which

case death is not consummated, But if added to feeling pleasure, an acceptance of it, turning it to action, to a habit, then a kind of despair, the man in question will be condemned, for "*there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days*". ... Here comes the Lord for whom all these things are easy. Yet in that particular situation, it seemed as though there was some difficulty, "*He groaned in Himself*" and appeared in need of some help to heal those who were overwhelmed by the habit. But at His cry-out, the hosts of Hades were terrified, grave clothes that bound the dead man were loosed, and Lazarus came back to life. ... He who is dead for four days is counted as have fallen asleep as far as the Lord who intends to raise him, is concerned

(St. Augustine)

- + In case you stay in what concerns dust, you will eventually turn to dust. It is befitting o you to change; to turn around, to become heavenly.

- + The high waves would impact those who are not with Jesus, separated from him, through not keeping His holy statutes, and through sin, from Him who is able to save. ... If we seem to be in a spiritual darkness, if we seem to be swallowed by the evil habits, let us then accept Jesus; for He will save us from dangers, sin, and death.

(St. Cyril the Great)

1- Jehoahaz (Reigned 3 months reign, then removed by Egypt.

1 – 4

2- Jehoiakim (Reigned 11 years; then captivated by the king of Babylon)

5 - 8

- 3- Jehoiakin (Reigned 3 months and ten days; then captivated by the king of Babylon) 9 - 10
- 4- Zedekiah (Reigned 11 years, then rebelled against Babylon) 11 - 16
- 5- The slaughter of the multitudes. 17
- 6- The desolation of the city and the temple 18 - 19
- 7- The captivation of the people 20 - 21
- 8- The return from captivity 22 - 23

1- JEHOAHAZ (REIGNED THREE MONTHS; THEN REMOVED BY EGYPT:

“Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father’s place in Jerusalem” (1)

Unfortunately, the godly Josiah made a serious mistake by entering into a battle against Necho without seeking the counsel of the Lord, and not perceiving that Babylon is the enemy more dangerous on Judah than Assyria. He disguised himself, entered the battle, was wounded and died. By his death Judah lost its independence, and submitted to Egypt for three or four years (609-606 B.C.). Egypt eventually retreated, and Babylon had the authority over Judah.

According to what came in (1 Chronicles 3: 15-16), Josiah had four sons:

- a- Johanan, the firstborn, about whom we know nothing; most probably died in his childhood
- b- Eliakim
- c- Zedekiah

d- Shallum, the youngest son whom the people set to sit on his father's throne. His name was changed to Jehoahaz at his enthronement (Jeremiah 22: 11)..

“Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem” (2)

It so seems that Eliakim preferred Egypt over Babylon from a political aspect, whereas his brother Jehoahaz would rather have Babylon as a ally against Egypt, like his father. That is why when Necho confronted Jehoahaz in Rableh – the Egyptian military center – he shackled him with a chain and took him prisoner to Egypt where he died; as was prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah, when he asked the people *“to weep not for the dead (Josiah) nor bemoan him, but to weep bitterly for him who goes away (Shallum—Jehoahaz), for he shall return no more, nor see his native country”* (Jeremiah 22: 10-12

“Now the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold”
(3)

Necho considered that he had defeated Judah, and that it became under his authority, and when the people set Jehoahaz a king without referring to him, he deposed him and made his brother Eliakim a king instead of him, and changed his name to Jehoiakim, for no cause except to confirm his authority over Judah.

“Then the king of Egypt made his brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz his brother and carried him to Egypt” (4)

The people assumed that Jehoahaz will eventually return from Egypt and sit on his throne; but the prophecy of Jeremiah was realized; for it is the fruit of sin, that man loses the spirit of royalty, and will not see the Higher Jerusalem, but will live in humiliation in the land of bondage, as Jehoahaz lived in Egypt in bitterness and sorrow until he died.

+ Perdition is the separation from God; for the adversary hosts have no other goal than our perdition.

(The scholar Origen)

+ Things concerning grace are accompanied with joy, peace, love, and truth ... Whereas those of sin are accompanied with disturbance and not love nor joy toward God.

(St. Maccari the Great)

+ While blamed with every wrinkle of my sins, I spend my days and nights in terror; But once I see how God looses the chains, and supports the terrified humble soul, I hear Him say to me , while cast in the tomb of my evil: [Jerome, come forth]

(St. Jerome)

+ As long as you bear a mortal body, you will be fought by sin. But I wish you do not let it reign over you... Namely cut off its desires, for once you obey it, it will reign over you... "Obey" means, to let your members be tools of iniquity for sin.

- + As long as sin is there in your members, do not let it have authority or reign over you; but drive it away, and do not obey its requirements. If anger stirs up in you, do not let your tongue obey it by uttering an evil word; nor let your hand or foot obey it by stretching either to strike. ... The unreasonable anger would never stir up in you, if sin is not in your members; Yet you can drive away its prevailing power, by deny it the weapons to fight you; for then it would learn not to stir up in you, for it would have no more weapons ... So it is befitting of every one of us to strive for perfection; for when the evil desire finds itself without response from your members , it would become less and less.

(St. Augustine)

2- JEHOIAKIM (Reigned 11 years, then captivated by the king of Babylon):

“Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God?” (5)

“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him, and bound him in bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon” (6)

Nebuchadnezzar, as well robbed all the articles of the temple; and Jehoiakim died in Babylon the death of an evildoer (Jeremiah 36: 30).

While Jehoahaz represents the one persistent on his evil, who loses his royalty and his heavenly home, for sin to reign on him; Jehoiakim, on the other hand, refers to the wicked one against whom the king of Babylon (the symbol of the devil) will come up, bind him in bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon (the confusion); The fruits of sin are therefore the following:

- a- Instead of the authority given to man to trample on the serpents and the scorpions and over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10: 19); the enemy will prevail upon him, to trample on him and humiliate him.
- b- It denies him freedom, and chains him with bitter fetters.
- c- It denies him knowledge, wisdom, and reason; for it brings him forth to Babylon (confusion).

And on the contrary, by repentance, the believer will enjoy:

- a- He enjoys the authority to trample on the hosts of darkness
- b- He enjoys the glorious liberty of the children of God
- c- He enjoys a renewable knowledge, a growing wisdom, and reason in everything.

According to some, the seventy years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah starts by the captivation of Jehoiakim, chaining him in fetters, and taking him forth to Babylon.

+ The way a physician hates illness, and applies all his knowledge to take it away from his patient to heal him, So does God, He works by His grace in us, to scatter the sin and heels man from it..

+ Therefore, the apostle says with us: "*For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man*" (Romans 7: 22). We therefore free when we delight in the law of God; for freedom, here, is accompanied with joy. For as long as you do goodness out of fear, God is not the subject of your pleasure. Find your pleasure in Him to become free. Do not fear punishment, as much as you should love righteousness. ... If you still do not love righteousness, .. Fear punishment, to gain the love of righteousness..

- + A Christian should never say: [I am free to do whatever I like; nobody has any right to bridle my will]. ... If, by such freedom you commit sin, you are, therefore, a slave of the sin. ... Do not corrupt your freedom by becoming a slave to sin, but rather use it to avoid committing a sin. *“For you brethren have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another”* (Galatians 5: 13)

(St. Augustine)

- + The “free” are so called, not according to their position in the society, but according to their life and nature; The freedom of the soul and its beatitude are a result of the true purity and the despise of the temporal..
- + The free man is he who is not enslaved by the evil pleasures of life, but who can control his body by good ordinance and chastity; satisfied with what he is given by the Lord, however few, giving Him thanks by his whole heart.

(St. Abba Anthony)

“Nebuchadnezzar also carried off some of the articles from the house of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon” (7)

As the king, the leaders, and the people of Judah, walked in evil; the articles of the house of the world, which were counted as the best in the world, were taken

away to serve the gods of the Gentiles, as chastisement for Judah. Although the false prophets who used to talk smooth claimed that they will soon return (Jeremiah 27: 16), the prophet Jeremiah prophesied that the rest of the articles will be carried away to Babylon after the people are taken into captivity (Jeremiah 27: 21-22). Which was actually realized.

“Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, the abominations which he did, and what was found against him, indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah, then Jehoiakin his son reigned in his place” (8)

Jehoiakim, brought idol;-worship back to Judah with all its abominations that were previously removed by his father Josiah (Jeremiah 7: 9, 30-31; 19: 3-13; 25: 1)

“and what was found against him”, According to some, he means his betrayal to the king of Babylon; but according to some Jewish interpreters, certain tattoo marks were found on his corpse, made to honor the idols; when making tattoos on the body was banned by the law (Leviticus 19: 28).

3- JEHOIAKIN (Reigned three months and ten days; then was captivated by the king of Babylon):

“Jehoiakin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord” (9)

In the Greek documents, as well as in the book of the kings, it came that Jehoiakin was eighteen years old when he became king, and not eight years. It seems that he was a partner on the throne with his father when he was eight years old, then reigned alone when he reached the age of eighteenth years.

When Evil-Merodach became the king of Babylon, he released Jehoiakin from captivity (2 king 25: 27-30); which is not mentioned here.

“At the turn of the year king Nebuchadnezzar summoned him and took him to Babylon with the costly articles from the house of the Lord, and made Zedekiah, Jehoiakim’s brother , king over Judah and Jerusalem” (10)

When the corrupt kings chose by their own free will to worship idols, God allowed for the articles of His house to be taken away to the temples of idols in Babylon. When man chooses the way of sin by his own free will for the sake of evil carnal pleasure, God forsakes him to the devil to enslave him.

Zedekiah was called Jehaiakin’s brother, though he was his uncle; which was the custom in the old, as Abraham used to call his nephew ‘Lot’ his brother.

4- ZEDEKIAH (Reigned 11 years; then rebelled against Babylon):

“Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem” (11)

His name was Mattaniah, before it was changed to Zedekiah by the king of Babylon (2 kings 24: 17)

“He also did evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord” (12)

Although the kings of Judah knew the history of their kingdom, and perceived that being the people of God, they will have no salvation, nor be established on

the throne as David's household; except by being attached to the living God, Yet they, with all their energies sought to spread idol-worship, and to oppress that of the living God. Despite suffering so much humiliation, they did not heed the divine chastisements,

“And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear an oath by God; but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel” (13)

Of the sins committed by Zedekiah is breaking the oath he made to Nenuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 17: 18-20; 21: 25).

The desolation happened in a horrible way because of the foolishness of Zedekiah to rebel against the king of Babylon, breaking his promise he made in the name of the Lord, and not heeding the counsel of Jeremiah, the lost prophet before captivity. Although Zedekiah and the officials of his royal palace, had a chance to repent through the preaching of the prophet Jeremiah and other prophets (Jeremiah 37: 2); but they stubbornly stiffened their necks and hardened their hearts; and defiled the house of the Lord God of Israel

“Moreover all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord which He consecrated in Jerusalem” (14)

Unfortunately, the temple and the worship were defiled by both the people of God and their enemies.

“And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place” (15)

“But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy” (16)

The book referred to that the king and the leaders stubbornly, and foolishly did not heed the warnings of God through his men(15); as mentioned in (Jeremiah 7: 13, 25; 25: 3-4; 26: 5; 29: 10; 15: 35; 44: 4; and see 11: 7; 32: 23); but they even mocked His messengers , despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets. When the cup of their evil became full, there was nothing left, therefore, but to bring on them the cruel chastisement through the Babylonian captivity.

5- THE SLAUGHTER OF THE MULTITUDES:

“Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men by the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young men or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand” (17)

Here the author presents to us the following portrait of the desolation that dwelt upon Judah:

- a- The young men were killed by the sword in the house of their sanctuary (Ezekiel 9: 6-7; Lamentations 2: 7, 20), where they took refuge to be protected against the Babylonians; when they, themselves have previously defiled it with the idols of the Gentiles (14)
- b- They robbed all what was left of the articles and the treasures of the house of the Lord, in the house of the king and those of the leaders of Judah.
- c- The temple and the palaces of Jerusalem were burned, the walls were broken down (19); and what they did not carry away, they destroyed.

d- Those who were spared of being killed were taken captive to Babylon
(20)

6- THE DESOLATION OF THE CITY AND THE TEMPLE:

“And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon” (18)

“Then they burned the house of God. Broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions” (19)

+ Now, as the earthly Jerusalem was desolated because of the evil of its inhabitants; Is it not befitting of us to mourn our spiritual Jerusalem?!

In case man sins after receiving the sacraments of truth, he would be worth of being mourned; for he has forsaken Jerusalem, his home , and still did not return ... Let us then, morn our Jerusalem, which, because of our sins, is surrounded, and put under siege by enemies (the evil spirits); who will not leave in it a stone unturned. Particularly if this man had previously practiced chastity and purity for a long time, then the carnal lusts stirred up in him, to make him fall into adultery, as according to the prophet Ezekiel: *“All the righteousness he has done shall not be remembered”* (Ezekiel 18: 24).

7- THE CAPTIVATION OF THE PEOPLE:

“And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia” (20)

Nebuchadnezzar and his successors used the captives as slaves in their projects. When the kings, the leaders, and the people rejected to be attached to God who granted them many blessings, and who brought them forth to the promised land; God allowed for them to be brought over to Babylon, from where He had previously called their father Abraham , the man of faith, to depart. It is as though God calls them now to follow the lead of their father Abraham to get back what they have lost because of their rejection of faith. ... There is no way to return to Jerusalem except by faith and true repentance,

- + It is better for the reader to contemplate in his way of life, and in the rarity of the true exaltation; to remember that when thousands of Judah was led into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon; Jeremiah, the prophet alone was left in Jerusalem to praise God.. Then, although he was cast by men of the king of Judah into a dungeon of mire (Jeremiah 38: 6), yet his soul had stronger impact on the destiny of Israel;

(St. Jerome)

“to fulfill the word of the Lord on the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (21)

The captivity of the Jews covered the period from the year 587 B.C. when Jerusalem fell, to the year 517 B.C. (20). The liberation from captivity did not happen sporadically or by a chance; for it was so previously prophesied by the weeping prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25: 10-12).

“Until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths”, The word ‘punishment’ or ‘chastisement’ was not the last in the book, but the enjoyment of the comfort of

the Sabbath, as they returned to Jerusalem in the seventieth year of captivity; namely in the Sabbatical year (Leviticus 24: 26-35)..... The captivity, being a purging period for the people; it has to have an end.

Those seventy years are equivalent to the Sabbaths broken by the Jews; as instead of the celebration and worshipping God, they were preoccupied with the temporal issues for earthly benefits. For the sake of greed they did not keep the Sabbath and the Sabbatical year; but worked the land during them; hence the land became desolate and uncultivated against their will, until the Sabbaths which were not kept by the people along the generations were fulfilled. It was written: *“Then the land shall enjoy the Sabbaths, as long as it lies desolate and you are in the enemies’ land”* (Leviticus 26: 34).

8- THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY:

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying” (22)

The second book of the chronicles ended by the fulfillment of the prophecy of the prophet Jeremiah of the return from captivity at the end of the seventieth year. Thus, despite the corruption of the majority of the kings of Judah, together with the leaders and the people, God remains faithful, proclaims His mercies, and fulfills His divine promises; as a symbol of our enjoyment of the liberation from the captivity of the devil and sin, by the Salvation work of the Lord Christ.

“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: ‘All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem which is in

Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up” (23)

By such an end to the book, the author reveals its goal, in that God, the Controller of History seeks our return to the paradisiacal life, and to set His kingdom in the inner Jerusalem, namely in our hearts

+ Concerning freedom in this world, Where is the truth when you say “*We have never been in bondage by any one*” John 8: 33), Was Joseph not sold? (Genesis 37: 28); Have the saintly prophets not gone to

captivity? (2 kings 24; Exodus 1: 1); Has this nation while making bricks in Egypt, served violent rulers? (Exodus 1: 14)..... If you have never been enslaved, O people of denial, Why has God continually reminded you that he saved you from the house of bondage? (Exodus 13: 3; Deuteronomy 5: 6); Why do you pay tax to the Romans; through which you attempted to set a trap for the Truth, when you said: “*Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?*” (Matthew 22: 17) So that if he answers ‘Yes’, you would hasten to accuse him of doing harm to the freedom of the seed of Abraham; And if he said ‘No’, you would hasten, as you actually did, to accuse him before the kings of the earth of provoking the people to rebel.

+ “*He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men*” (Ephesians 4: 8). Being hanged on the cross, He nailed the sin which had driven us out of paradise to the cross, and led captivity captive, as is written.

As a result of the fall of Adam, our enemy captivated us, took hold of us under his authority; by which the souls of men, after departing from the bodies, had to go to Hades, for the gates of paradise were closed shut before them. But once the Lord Christ was raised on the holy cross, the Life-giver, He took us away from captivity where we were enslaved

through out our fall; In other words He took hold of us from the hand of the enemy, and made us captives to Him by His conquest and driving away him who had captivated us. That is the reason of saying: "*He led captivity captive*".

+ Jesus returned filled with the Holy Spirit to the wilderness to challenge the devil; For otherwise, the Lord would not have conquest for my sake in a secret way, liberating Adam from captivity.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 CHRONICLES 36

LIBERATE ME FROM THIS CAPTIVITY

+ The wicked kings delivered Judah to the Babylonian captivity;
Judah led herself into captivity in idol-worship
And You gave her, her heart's desire, by letting the pagan king captivate her;

She drank from the bitter cup she filled for herself;
She lost her independence, freedom, peace, and joy;
Then You, the whole Goodness, liberated her from captivity;
To make her anticipate Your coming; not to redeem her alone, but to redeem the whole world;

You came to our land to liberate mankind from the captivity of sin, and of the devil.

+ With every wicked king of Judah, I discovered my weaknesses;

I cried out to You seeking the work of Your grace in my life;
Jehoahaz the evil king was removed by the king of Egypt;
He took him prisoner to Egypt in chains;
And set a heavy tax on Judah;
Through my sins, the prince of this world crawled into my heart;
He took away Your kingdom from me; for there is no fellowship between
You and him;

He chained me with the evil desires, and took me away from the
heavenly thought;

He took me down to the pit, put his heavy burden on me, instead of the
sweet yoke of Your commandments.

+ The king of Egypt set Eliakim a king, and changed his name Jehoiakim;
The king of Babel has gone up against him, and chained him with bronze
fetters;

He led him with humiliation and reproach; and robbed the articles of the
house of the Lord;

And carried them away to the temple of the idols amid the abominations;
How violent is the devil, whom I allow to enter into my mind and
emotions;

He, who let me lose my identity as a believer, and changed my name;
Instead of being a son of God, I became a slave to the devil

He robbed all my energies, talents, and capabilities;

Instead of being used to the account of the kingdom of God, They
became tools of iniquity to the account of the kingdom of the devil

He corrupted my body, my soul, and my whole being;

Instead of being a temple for You where Your Holy Spirit dwells;

I became a corrupt vessel for iniquity;

Have mercy on me, O God of the impossible; Sanctify me, O Mighty Holy
One.

+ Jehoiakin walked along the same procession of the corrupt kings;
And was captivated by the king of Babylon, and took him away together
with the rest of the precious articles of the house of the Lord;
Have mercy on me, O Wisdom of God, and take away the corruption from
me;
To be liberated from the city of Babylon, where confusion and corruption
of thoughts are;
To enjoy Your precious gifts, instead of what the enemy has robbed from
me.

+ Have mercy on me, lest I walk along the way of the rebellious Zedekiah
Make me listen to Your voice through Your prophets;
So as not to defile Your house, namely my body, which You sanctified by
Your precious blood;
By You I will be liberated from the king of Babylon, who destroyed Your
city and Your temple;
Make me repent, and heel me;
Purge me, and sanctify me;
I longed to return to Your divine bosoms;
I lift my heart up to Your heavens;
Glory be to You, who turn the earth into heaven, and men into angels;
Behold, I see You longing to carry mankind, and bring them forth to Your
heavens.

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CONTENTS

THE SECOND BOOK OF THE CHRONICLES

AN INTRODUCTION

SEEKING THE FACE OF THE HEAVENLY KING

The kingdom of David's house; King Solomon; The kings after the dissension;
Features of the book; Divisions of the book;

-- An inspiration from the second book of the chronicles: Grant me to
build Your holy house.

THE FIRST SECTION

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON

(Chapters 1 to 9)

The reign of Solomon, and the righteousness of the Lord Christ

CHAPTER 1: THE BEGIIING OF SOLOMON'S REIGN

The Lord exalts Solomon; The tabernacle of meeting should come
first; The altar and the sacrifices; God appears to Solomon; Solomon seeks from
God wisdom and knowledge; God gives us more than we

ask; Solomon and his chariots and horsemen.

-- An inspiration from chapter 1: In Your company, O Lord, I shall
take the royal path

CHAPTER 2: THE PREPARATION FOR BUILDING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.

The interior preparations for the building; Solomon seeks a skilful
man from the king of Tyre; Solomon seeks the best kinds of wood;
Solomon gives a pledge to sustain the workers; A message from

the king of Tyre to Solomon; The aliens who were dwelling in the land of Israel partake of the work..

-- An inspiration from chapter 2: What do You want me to do, O Lord?

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The place and time of building the temple; The dimensions and the decorations of the temple; The two cherubs in The Most Holy Place; The curtain (the veil) of the temple; The pillars; A warning.

-- An inspiration from chapter 3: Set, O Lord, Your amazing temple in me.

CHAPTER 4: THE METAL FURNITURE AND THE HOLY ARTICLES OF THE TEMPLE

The bronze altar; the sea of cast bronze; the lampstands and the tables; The doors for the priests' courts; The holy articles and others.

-- An inspiration from chapter 4: How great is the work of Your hand in me, O Lord.

CHAPTER 5: DELIVERING THE TEMPLE TO THE LORD

All the articles dedicated by king David brought into the temple; The ark of the covenant brought into the house of the Lord; Singing thanksgiving to the Lord; A cloud, and the glory of God fills the house of the Lord.

-- An inspiration from chapter 5: Find Your rest, O Lord, in my heart

CHAPTER 6: THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, AND THE KING BLESSES THE CONGREGATION OF ISRAEL

Encountering Him who dwells in the dark cloud; The king blesses the congregation of Israel; A prayer before the altar of the Lord (a- Seeking from the Lord to fulfill His promises; b- God the Merciful

judges His people; c- God the Leader of the army, and the Liberator of the people; d- God accepts the repentance; e- God shows compassion on all the people; e- God the advocate of His believers; f- The power of prayer in His house; g- "*Remember the mercies of Your servant David*").

-- An inspiration from chapter 6: I bow down before You, O Lord, and spread my hands toward You..

CHAPTER 7: GOD RESPONDS TO SOLOMON'S PRAYER:

A public divine response to Solomon's prayer; The priests unable to enter the house of God because of the cloud that filled it; Animal sacrifices and offerings of praise; Joyful celebrations; The Lord appears to Solomon. The Lord warns Solomon against perversion from His commandments.

. -- An inspiration from chapter 7: Proclaim Your dwelling in my depths, O Lord.

CHAPTER 8: SOLOMON'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND COMMITMENTS.

The cities built by Solomon; The laborers used by Solomon; Solomon cares for his Egyptian wife, yet, out of the city of David; Solomon organizes the ministry in the temple; Solomon's commercial relationships with foreign nations.

-- An inspiration from chapter 8: Let me offer You a daily offering, and unceasing praise, O Lord.

CHAPTER 9: THE QUEEN OF SHEBA, AND SOLOMON'S WORLD FAME.

The queen of Sheba visits Solomon and honors him; The greatness of Solomon's court and his riches; The end of Solomon's reign.

-- An inspiration from chapter 9: Let me encounter and acquire You, O Wisdom of God.

THE SECOND SECTION
THE KINGS WHO CAME AFTER SOLOMON

(Chapter 10 to 36)

FROM REHOBOAM TO THE CAPTIVITY

THE SUCCESSORS OF SOLOMON; THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM: THE FOUNDATIONS OF REFORM; THE PROPHETS OF THAT ERA>

CHAPTER 10: A DISSENSION IN THE DAYS OF REHOBOAM

The foolishness of Rehoboam; The extremism of the dissenters
Their rejection of Rehoboam

-- An inspiration from chapter 10: Let Your hand hold, O Lord, the steering wheel of my life

CHAPTER 11: THE FAILING ATTEMPTS OF REHOBOAM.

An attempt by Rehoboam to bring the dissented ten tribes back to the kingdom; An attempt by Rehoboam to keep the remaining two tribes for himself; The return of the priests and the Levites to Jerusalem; Rehoboam's wives and children

-- An inspiration from chapter 11: How great is Your love, O Holy One.

CHAPTER 12: THE SORROWFUL DECLINE OF REHOBOAM:

Rehoboam and his people do evil in the sight of the Lord; .God delivers them into the hand of Shishak king of EgyptThe prophet Shemaiah calls for repentance; The repentance of the king and the leaders; God recedes His wrath; The personality of Rehoboam

-- An inspiration from chapter 12: By Your love, O Lord, You chastise to save..

CHAPTER 13: KING ABIJAH, SON OF REHOBOAM:

Abijah, king of Judah; Abijah assembles his army against Jeroboam; Abijah's speech addressed to Jeroboam and his people; Israel defeated by Judah; The end of Abijah's life.

-- An inspiration from chapter 13: You are, O Lord, my stronghold, my conquest, and my salvation.

CHAPTER 14: ASA, KING OF JUDAH:

The godliness of king Asa; The politics of king Asa; Asa's conquest over the Ethiopians.

-- An inspiration from chapter 14: By Your divine arm, O Lord, sanctify and save me.

CHAPTER 15: ASA'S INTERNAL REFORM:

A divine message to Asa on the tongue of a prophet; Asa's zeal to remove the idols; The spoils of war dedicated to the Lord; Making a covenant with God; A reform of the royal court; The high places were not removed; Bringing the dedicated things into the house of the Lord; Great peace for the kingdom.

-- An inspiration from chapter 15: Sanctify my days, O Lord, and proclaim Your dwelling in me.

CHAPTER 16: THE DECLINATION OF ASA IN HIS LAST DAYS

A foolish treaty between Asa and Ben-Hadad king of Aram; God rebukes Asa on the tongue of Hanan the seer; Asa got offended by what the seer told him; Asa's illness and death.

-- An inspiration from chapter 16: Grant me, O Lord, an upright heart to trust You, and to conquer by You.

THE SPIRITUAL REFORM IN THE ERA OF KING JEHOSHAPHAT

(Chapters 17 to 30)

CHAPTER 17: THE LIFE AND REIGN OF KING JEHOSHAPHAT

Jehoshaphat sits on the throne and establish his kingdom; The godly Jehoshaphat keeps the commandments of God; Jehoshaphat cares for teaching and worshipping God; Jehoshaphat's impact upon the surrounding nations; Jehoshaphat's military might.

-- An inspiration from chapter 17: You are, O Lord, the secret of my prosperity.

CHAPTER 18: AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN JEHOSHAPHAT AND AHAB, KING OF ISRAEL

An alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahab the evil king of Israel; Jehoshaphat joins Ahab in his attempt to restore the city of Ramoth Gilead; Ahab seeks the counsel of false prophet; Jehoshaphat seeks the counsel of a prophet of the Lord; The Lord saves Jehoshaphat from death in the battle; Ahab wounded in the battle and dies.

-- An inspiration from chapter 18: A corrupt and an evil alliance.

CHAPTER 19: A RETURN TO JERUSALEM:

Jehoshaphat's safe return to Jerusalem; Jehoshaphat rebuked by the prophet Jehu, the son of Hanan, on his alliance with Ahab; Jehoshaphat cares to reform the kingdom; Jehoshaphat instructs the judges he appointed for the minor courts of justice; Jehoshaphat instructs the judges he appointed for the major courts of justice.

-- An inspiration from chapter 19: Bring me back, O Lord, to the higher Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 20: FOREIGN INVASION, AND SALVATION BY SINGING PRAISE TO THE LORD:

A foreign invasion; Resort to God; God sends a prophet to Jehoshaphat confirm conquest; Singing praise to the Lord, as a

weapon for conquest; The defeat of the enemy; Jehoshaphat and his people offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving; The end of Jehoshaphat's life.

-- An inspiration from chapter 20: Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of joy in the midst of the battle.

CHAPTER 21: KING JEHORAM OF JUDAH PASSED AWAY TO NO ONE'S SORROW:

Jehoram reigns in his father Jehoshaphat's place; To establish his throne, Jehoram, the evil king kills his brothers; Jehoram walks in the ways of the kings of Israel; Jehoram's conquest over the Edomites as a

divine gift; The prophet Elijah prophesies against Jehoram; Jehoram's defeat before the Philistines and the Arabians; The Lord chastises Jehoram by sickness; Jehoram passes away to no one's sorrow.

. -- An inspiration from chapter 21: Grant me, O Lord the true spirit of liberty

CHAPTER 22: KING AHAZIAH THE SON OF JEHORAM, AND THE BLOOD-THIRSTY QUEEN ATHALIAH:

Ahaziah king of Judah; Ahaziah walks in the ways of Ahab king of Israel; Ahaziah joins Jehoram king of Israel in war; Jehu kills Ahaziah; Athaliah, mother of Ahazia takes the throne by force; Hiding Joash, son of

Ahaziah in the temple.

An inspiration from chapter 22: Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of leadership and care.

CHAPTER 23: JOASH, SON OF AHAZIAH MADE A KING; AND ATHALIAH ASSASINATED:

Jehoiada the priest prepares the people to receive Joash as king of Judah; Jehoiada introduces king Joash to the people; Athaliah who took the throne by force, assassinated; The reforms of king Joash.

-- An inspiration from chapter 23: Reign, O Lord, in my heart, and kill every evil in it.

CHAPTER 24: THE PERVERSION OF KING JOASH:

Joash repairs of the temple; Restoration of worship in the temple; The apostasy of king Joash, and God sends a prophet to warn him; The king gives a command to stone Zechariah the prophet to death; Aram (Syria) invades Judah; Joash assassinated and buried.

-- An inspiration from chapter 24: Save me, O Lord, from myself.

CHAPTER 25: AMAZIAH KING OF JUDAH

Amaziah avenges the murder of his father; Amaziah's obedience of the Lord; Amaziah's conquest over the Edomites; Amaziah challenges the king of Israel; Amaziah's sorrowful end.

-- An inspiration from chapter 25: S joyfull beginning and a sorrowful end

Chapter 26: UZZIAH (Azariah) king of Judah:

Uzziah walks upright in the sight of the Lord; Uzziah's conquests in war; Uzziah's constructions; Uzziah's works of organization; Haughtily, Uzziah forces himself upon the task of priesthood; Uzziah struck with leprosy; Uzziah isolation until his death

--An inspiration from chapter 26: Grant me the spirit of humilty, to be like You, O King of kings.

AN ANNEX TO CHAPTER 26:

UZZIAH THE KING AND ISAIAH THE PROPHET – by ST. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi.

The daughter of Abraham Israel) corrupted her kings; King Uzziah forces himself upon the task of priesthood; Two integrated authorities: Priesthood, on the spirit, and royalty on the body; The

priest rebukes king Uzziah on what he did; Uzziah's anger against Azariah the priest; Uzziah clothed with a shirt of leprosy; The pure heart and mind are like holy incense raised before God; The seraphim believe in the secret of the Holy Trinity, and taught it to the prophet Isaiah; The "Trisagion" (the three Holies) refer to the equality of the Persons of the Holy Trinity; The Jews do not believe that God the Father has a Son, whom He revealed to the children of His secret; The live coal of Isaiah symbolize the secret of the body of the son of God (Isaiah 6: 6-7); Nature and the Holy Book testify to the Son and the Holy Trinity; Evidences for the Son: The sun and its light, the tree and its fruits, and the soul and its Word; Isaiah preaches the Holy Trinity; Blessed is the church that believes in the Holy Trinity.

CHAPTER 27: JOTHAM KING OF JUDAH

Jotham did what is right in the sight of God; Jotham's constructions; Jotham's conquest over the Ammonites; The secret behind Jotham's strength and prosperity; The duration of Jotham's reign, and his death

-- An inspiration from chapter 27: Carry all on Your shoulders, O Savior of the world

CHAPTER 28: AHAZ, THE WICKED KING

Ahaz did nothing good;; The great evil of Ahaz; Ahaz collapses before the king of Aram; Ahaz collapses before the king of Israel; The prophet Obed rebukes the army of Israel; Ahab vainly resorts to Assyria;

Ahaz resorts to the god's of Damascus; Ahaz resorts to other gods; Ahaz's disgraceful death:

-- An inspiration from chapter 28: Drive away, O Lord every sin from my heart, to find comfort in You.

AN ANNEX TO CHAPTER 28: QUICK QOTES FROM AN ESSAY
ON 'RAISING CHILDREN AND THE VAIN GLORY' BY: ST. JOHN
CHRYOSTOM:

The importance of the proper raising of children; Raising a child is a holy task; Follow the lead of the fathers who cared for their children; Counsels to parents: (Choice of the child's name; Teach the child to be content and satisfied with what God has given him; Direct the child toward the Holy Books; Deliver the child into the hand of the Lord; God Himself cares for raising the children; Appreciate the value and the capabilities of your child; A warning against use of corporal punishment; Teach and train your child according to his specific abilities; Teach your child by example; Care to check out those who may have influence on your child; Care to sanctify the senses of your child; The purity of the child's heart; Chastity and purity in the life of our children; The priority of wisdom in raising children; Keeping our children against pagan practices; Puttin no wrong concepts in the minds of our children; Care for the salvation of our children; Care to teach and train your child on temporal issues; Encourage your children to consecrate themselves to God; If you fail to raise your child yourself, time will raise him; The crime of negligence in raising children; Let us care to prepare them for the holy matrimony.

THE REFORM IN THE ERA OF KING HEZEKIAH

(Chapters 29 to 32)

CHAPTER 29: KING HEZEKIAH AND CONSECRATING THE HOUSE OF THE
LORD

King Hezekiah brought the priests and the Levites back to the house of the Lord; Hezekiah exhorts the Levites to cleanse the house of the Lord; Hezekiah makes atonement fpr the sins of the previous kings;

Hezekiah cares to offer sacrifices of praise and of burnt offerings to God

-- An inspiration from chapter 29: Purity and prosperity.

CHAPTER 30: HEZEKIAH CALLS THE TWO KINGDOMS TO COME TO JERUSALEM TO CELEBRATE THE FEAST OF PASSOVER AND OF THE UNLEAVENED BREAD:

Hezekiah calls the two kingdoms to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover; Hezekiah postpones the celebration of the Feast of Passover to the second month of the year; Hezekiah exhorts all to

celebrate the Feast; The celebration of the Feast of Passover.

-- An inspiration from chapter 30: Let the hearts of Your people rejoice in You.

CHAPTER 31: CARE FOR THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

Hezekiah destroys the traces the idol-worship in the two kingdoms; Hezekiah cares to organize the ministry of the divisions of the priests; Hezekiah cares to sustain the priests and their families: (Hezekiah

offers a grant to support the ministry in the temple; Hezekiah exhorts the congregation to increase the portion of the priests; The generosity of the people; Hezekiah appoints officers to distribute what was collected; The king's heart enflamed by the zeal to work)

-- An inspiration from chapter 31: Let me dwell in Your house, and adorn me with Your commandments.

CHAPTER 32: BY FAITH, KING HEZEKIAH CHALLENGES ASSYRIA AND HIS ILLNESS

The spirit of power and not of failure: Three temptations confront king Hezekiah; The circumstances in which Hezekiah lives: Sennacherib enters the cities of Judah; Sennacherib's purpose was to make war against Jerusalem; Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah

pray to God; The Lord sends an angel to save Hezekiah; God heals Hezekiah from his illness; Hezekiah's heart lifted up; Hezekiah's death and burial.

-- An inspiration from chapter 32: Be with me, O Lord, and fight my battles.

CHAPTER 33: MANASSEH KING OF JUDAH AND HIS SON KING AMON:

Manasseh's evil, and his apostasy from God; Manasseh's repentance and prosperity; The end of Manasseh's reign; The prayer of Manasseh; Amon, the evil king;

-- An inspiration from chapter 33: The doors of Your love are open before all sinners.

CHAPTER 34: JOASH KING OF JUDAH

The personality of king Joash; Joash's zeal to remove the idols; Joash's care to repair the temple; The discovery of the book of the law of God in the temple; Reading the book of law of God in a public assembly.

-- An inspiration from chapter 34: Send, O Holy One, shepherds according to Your heart.

CHAPTER 35: JOASH AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER:

A good beginning and a sorrowful end; The celebration of the Passover; Joash's zeal to celebrate the Passover; Joash enters into a battle against the Pharaoh of Egypt; All Judah and Jerusalem mourn the death of Joash.

-- An inspiration from chapter 35: Let me celebrate the Christian Passover, and adorn myself with the true love.

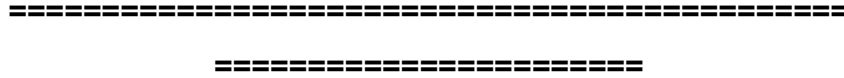
CHAPTER 36: TO CAPTIVITY AND BACK:

The last kings of Judah: Jehoahaz (3 months; then removed by Egypt); Jehoiakim (11 years; then captivated by the king of Babylon;); Jehoiakin (three months and ten days, then captivated by the king of

Babylon); Zedekiah (11 years; rebelled against Babylon); The slaughter of the multitude; The destruction of the city and the temple; The captivation of the people; The return from captivity.

An inspiration from chapter 36:: Liberate me, O Lord, from this captivity

CONTENTS.



THE END OF THE BOOK.