

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

EZEKIEL

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EZEKIEL AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN

The book of Ezekiel was written “to the house of Israel” (Ez. 3:1); for every true believer in the Church of God - the new Israel - to live by; to experience the dealings of God, to comprehend the mysteries of the kingdom, and to get filled by hope of the fellowship of heavenly glory.

The prophet Jeremiah has been the last prophet in Jerusalem before captivity. Although he was a contemporary of the captivity, yet he did not go to Babylon with the captives, but stayed with the remnants in Jerusalem, strongly testifying to his God; and was ultimately carried together with them to Egypt, where he was stoned to death. As for Ezekiel, the prophet and priest, he has been a young man (25 years old), when he was taken into captivity, to consummate the mission of the prophet Jeremiah. He carried the divine voice, to remind the people of the reason behind their captivation; calling for repentance and the return to God; giving them hope; and revealing to them the promises of God and His salvation plan.. He was a tool of God, which sustained passion for the sake of the testimony to the Truth.

If we contemplate on the book of Revelation, we shall see, as though the prophet Ezekiel has gone forth across the centuries, hand in hand with the beloved apostle John, to behold the higher Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God with His people, to the heavenly temple.

The book of Ezekiel is the book of every true believer, who wishes to encounter with the Holy God; offering a daily repentance for his sin; in order to experience the new life in Christ Jesus; and to enjoy the precious divine promises.

The book of Ezekiel is your book; that touches your life and depths.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

INTRODUCTION

“Ezekiel” is a Hebrew word meaning (God gives strength). As Ezekiel has been called to minister to an impudent, hard-hearted, stubborn, and a rebellious nation (Ez. 2:3, 4; 3:7, 8), he was in need for God’s strength to support him to deal with them¹.

Origen, in his first homily on the book of Ezekiel, sees in the Lord Christ, the new Ezekiel, that is, (God gives strength). If He descended to our land, as though among captives, and was called “the Son of Man,” as Ezekiel was called “Son of man;” He will truly set us free of captivity, to experience “God’s strength” through His cross.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES AROUND THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

The book of Ezekiel provided us with very limited information about the life of that prophet; the most prominent of which is that he dwelt in the land of captivity by the River of Chebar (Ez. 1:3), close to ‘Tel Abib’ (Ez. 3:15); that he was married, and had a house; that his beloved wife died, for whom he “sighed in silence,” the only phrase by which the prophet expressed emotions concerning his own life. According to tradition, Ezekiel dwelt in the same location where Noah did, close to the garden of Eden; that is why he often referred to both (Ez. 14:14, 20; 28:13; 31:8, 16, 9, 18; 36:35)². We can divide his life into two stages: before and after captivity.

EZEKIEL BEFORE CAPTIVITY:

He was born around 623 BC., the son of ‘Buzi,’ a priest, a descendant of Zadok, who, some Jewish scholars believed to be a son of the prophet Jeremiah, also called ‘Buzi,’ as a sign of disrespect by the Jews³.

That period has been characterized by two things, that could not be easily disregarded, that influenced the prophet: The first was a movement of reformation on the hand of King ‘Josiah,’ in the year 621 BC; and the second was a state of prophetic revival.

¹ *Baker's Pictorial Introduction to the Bible*, 1967, p.189.

² *Ibid*, 192.

³ *Torgum: Yer. quoted by Kimhi on Ezek. 1:3.*

(1) Undoubtedly, Ezekiel harbored in his mind, certain memories of his early childhood, when, during the process of restoration of the Temple of Jerusalem by King 'Josiah,' the lost book of the Law was found, and read by the king, who was greatly moved by its contents.

Most probably, Ezekiel lived in the quarters of the priests built on the eastern wall; played as a child in the outer courts around the Temple; and attended a school on that same campus. He probably helped his priest father, ministering in preparing the incense, or in lighting the candles in the holy Temple; and used to listen to the teachers of the Temple, and to ask them questions; looking forward to his thirtieth birthday, when the time comes for him to carry out his priestly task in the Temple of the Lord.

(2) As to the prophetic revival, Ezekiel had to be influenced by the prophets who came before him; like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and particularly Hosea, whose fingerprints are obvious on every chapter of his early prophecies. He must as well, have been aware of the prophets contemporary to him: like Jeremiah, Daniel, Nahum, Zephaniah, and probably also Habakkuk and Obadiah. He enjoyed the sweet words of Habakkuk; yet he was influenced to a greater degree by the prophet Jeremiah, who believed that, although the restoration efforts of King Josiah, have covered the buildings of the Temple, as well as the rites of sacrifice offering, statutes, physical circumcision, etc.; yet they, unfortunately did not touch the inner heart in the people's life.

Ezekiel was also influenced by the political events in his time. When he was ten years old, the great city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria fell, to mark the end and dominion of that empire. After five years later, Necho, Pharaoh of Egypt, invaded Palestine with his army, and killed the good king Josiah at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29), because the latter went to the aid of the king of Assyria in his war against Pharaoh. By that, the calm movement of restoration that lasted for about 14 years, for which Ezekiel's father rejoiced, came to an end. Although the new king, Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, reigned only for three months in Jerusalem, yet it has been relatively long in the eyes of believers, on account of the evil he did in the sight of the Lord, for which the warning voice of the prophet Jeremiah ringed high.

Pharaoh took Jehoahaz to Egypt, where he died; and made Jehoiakim or Eliakim the son of Josiah, a king in his place. Pharaoh

refrained from destroying Jerusalem, to enjoy the tax of gold and silver, which he imposed on the land. He also planned to keep his relation with the kingdom of Judah, with the intention of setting an extended Pharoanic empire in the face of that of Babylon.

Ezekiel at that time was a young man, well aware of the changes that happened to his people: how new idols shamelessly appeared in the streets of Jerusalem; how evil came to the life of the priests and teachers; and how the ministry of the Temple collapsed. He saw the old prophet Jeremiah rebuking the priests; and probably listened to 'Baruch' the scribe, publicly reading in the hearing of the people in the Lord's house, the prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah, that he wrote in a scroll. He also heard how the king, after hearing a few of its phrases, cut the scroll with a knife, and cast it into the fire (Jeremiah 36:1-26). Although the inner soul of that young man 'Ezekiel' was bitter against his fellow priests and all the religious leaderships; yet he could not even refer to the name of Jeremiah, nor comment on his words.

In the same year, as Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, defeated Necho pharaoh of Egypt in the battle of Carchemish, the ambitions of Necho were devastated for a long time. The loyalty of Jehoiakim was transferred to Babylon; although a great section of his people preferred to submit to the Pharaoh of Egypt against Babylon, to avoid what befell the northern kingdom (Israel). That was probably also shared by the king personally; against which Jeremiah strongly warned. Around the year 600 B.C. (namely 5 years later), Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon. But within one or two years, the Babylonian armies besieged Jerusalem for 18 months, during which Jehoiakim, who kept on challenging Babylon till his last breath, died in doubtful circumstances. His son Jehoiachin who reigned after him, unconditionally surrendered to the Babylonians; and Nebuchadnezzar entered the holy city with his armies in the year 597 or 598 B.C.

This time, Nebuchadnezzar dealt with the situation in a gentle and unexpected way. He did not destroy the city, the Temple, its public buildings, nor even its military walls, but only took away the evil king Jehoiachin, whose reign did not exceed three months. He was carried into captivity to Babylon, together with the royal family, the elite, and the treasures of the Temple (2 Kings 24:8-16). The heart of Ezekiel was broken, to see the treasures of the Temple, beloved to him, that go back

to 300 years since the days of Solomon, melted and placed in the sacks of the Babylonians. The new king 'Zedekiah,' Jehoiachin's nephew (2 Kings 24:17), together with the uncircumcised pagans, defiled the holy places. Nebuchadnezzar also carried into captivity all the craftsmen and smiths, and every gifted young man - between whom was Ezekiel - to Babylon; to make sure that no rebellion could happen against him in Judah; none remained except the poorest people in the land (2 Kings 24:14).

That was the first stage of captivity for the people of Judah; that the Lord allowed to happen in stages, to give the priests and the people a chance to repent and to return to Him, so that He would forgive them. As for them, on the assumption that the Lord would never allow for the destruction of the Temple and the fall of the whole city, resorted to every other way but to repent.

BY THE RIVER CHEBAR¹

The young priest Ezekiel (25 years of age) left Jerusalem captivated to Babylon, to remain there with no hope for return. There, he lived with the other captives of his people by the River Chebar at or near 'Tel Abib' - not the city known nowadays by the same name. In the first years of his captivity, Ezekiel silently and bitterly watched what was befalling his people, while Babylon, at that time, was enjoying the climax of its greatness. Each day, new pearls were added to the crown of Nebuchadnezzar; something that represented a huge psychological impact on the Jews, who had been deprived of Jerusalem, which was their lost Paradise. Captivity was not in itself severe at that time, if we put aside the psychological aspect of deprivation of their home country. The captives were allotted land in Tel Abib by the River Chebar; not far from the capital with all its vast possibilities and luxuries; and they submitted to the law of 'Hammurabi²,' that was close to their own Law.

¹ A river or canal in the "land of the Chaldeans" (Ezek 1:3), on the banks of which some of the Jews were located at the time of the captivity, and where Ezekiel saw his earlier visions (1:1; 3:15,23; etc.). Actually, the Chebar was most likely not a river at all, but the famous Royal Canal of Nebuchadnezzar that connected the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

(The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

² HAMMURA'BI (ham-u-ra'bi). The sixth king of the famous First Dynasty of Babylon, formerly identified with Amraphel of Gen 14:1. This identification is now no longer possible as a result of the thousands of clay tablets recovered from the middle Euphrates city of Mari in 1937, and information based upon the Khorsabad List. New sources of information enable us to place

No limitations were put on their civil or religious activities; their tribes and families could get together at their own convenience; and their elders could act as judges among them. The authorities encouraged them to do business, and allowed them to own their own houses, as Ezekiel himself did. One of the most successful Jewish establishments, was 'Marashu and sons' Company, whose business documents were discovered by archeologists¹. Moreover, mail communication between them and their brothers in Jerusalem, was voluminous and uninterrupted.

In the fourth year of captivity, king Zedekiah visited Babylon, coming from Jerusalem, to have the entire city come to watch his procession.

In the fifth year of captivity (around 592 B.C.), seven years prior to the fall of Jerusalem at the next stage of captivity, heavens were opened for the first time before Ezekiel to behold visions of God. He saw the divine fiery chariot, as a sign of being given the prophetic mission that he carried out for about 22 years in the midst of that bitter atmosphere (592-570 B.C.). His prophecies were along the following order:

The fifth year of captivity	Ezek. 1-7.
The sixth year of captivity	Ezek. 8-19.
The seventh year of captivity	Ezek. 20-23.
The ninth year of captivity	Ezek. 24.
The eleventh year of captivity	Ezek. 25-29:18; 30:31.
The twelfth year of captivity	Ezek. 32-39.
The twenty-fifth year of captivity	Ezek. 40-48.
The twenty-seventh year of captivity	Ezek. 49:17 etc.

The most important events that Ezekiel went through during his prophetic mission were:

In the sixth year of captivity, Ezekiel heard of King Zedekiah's pact with the Pharaoh of Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar (Ez. 17:15). He wrote to draw his attention to the importance of keeping the oath with

Hammurabi's reign c. 1728-1686 B.C. (Albright). This is at least three centuries subsequent to the age of Abraham. Hammurabi exalted Babylon as his capital. His reign was one of great prosperity, advance in astronomy, architecture, mathematics, and literature. (From The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright (c) 1988.)

¹ S.L. Caiger: *Lives of the Prophets*. SPCK 1936, p.148.

which he committed himself; even though given to a pagan king; and that breaking it would make him fall under divine judgment.

He proclaimed that Zedekiah's destiny will be the same as that of Jehoahaz, who was taken captive to Egypt in the year 607 B.C. (19:4); and as that of 'Jehoiachin,' captivated by the Chaldeans (19:9); that 'Oholibah' (Jerusalem) shall have the same destiny of her older sister 'Oholah' (Samaria); on account of her sins that got worse (Ez. 23:1; 23:23). In the eighth year of captivity, a new Pharaoh (Apries) came to reign; and pressed Zedekiah to rebel against Babylon in the ninth year of captivity.

In the tenth year of captivity, Jerusalem came to fall under a bitter siege, to realize the prophecies of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel; the latter even fixed the very day of that event (Ez. 24:2). On the next year, Zedekiah, trying to escape by night, was caught in Jericho; his sons killed before his eyes; his eyes put out; and were taken bound to Babylon. The King of Babylon left nothing in the city of David, in the Temple of God, nor in the royal palace, that he did not destroy. Some people fled to Egypt, dragging with them the prophet Jeremiah and the scribe Baruch, to be welcomed there by the Pharaoh. As the Gentile nations rejoiced for the calamity of Israel, the prophecies (Ez. 25-29:18; 30:31) came to proclaim God's judgment against them.

Despite all those events, the prophet Ezekiel did not lose his hope (Ez. 34:13), although the grief of his heart was intense because of the destruction of the Temple. He watched the end of Jerusalem in his days. Yet God granted him visions of a New Jerusalem, a new temple, and a new worship. Although Nebuchadnezzar was in the climax of his glory; and Jehoiachin was in prison; yet the salvation and the return to Jerusalem were never far from the prophet's eyes (Ez. 36:11, 29, 30). He saw how God would raise His people, as He raises the dead, giving the dry bones life and spirit (Ez. 37).

The prophet Ezekiel presented a marvelous portrait of restoration, along several aspects, of which:

- * God would forgive sins (Ez. 36:11, 16, 19).

- * God would restore the two kingdoms of the north (Ephraim or Israel), and of the south (Judah), to a complete unity, under the reign of the royal seed of David.

- * God would condemn the irresponsible shepherds of the people;

would take away their authority; and would take on Himself the care for His people (Ez. 34).

* Prophesying the Messianic era (Ez. 34:23), through the spiritual return from the captivity of the devil and sin (Ez. 36:26).

* The last chapters came to mix the artistic work of rebuilding the new temple with the prophetic vision and priestly work.

HIS INFLUENCE¹

It seems that the prophet Ezekiel had no prominent influence over his contemporaries, whom he used to call the “rebellious house” (2:5, 6, 8; 3:9, 26, 27 etc.); complaining that, although many came to listen to him, yet they considered his speeches as some sort of entertainment, that carried artistic beauty; and did not heed his words (Ez. 23:30-33).

HIS MARTYRDOM

His countrymen mocked him, and resented his persistent rebuke of their evil and abominations. **St. Epiphanius** referred to an ancient tradition, that a certain judge had Ezekiel killed, because he reproached him for worshipping idols. It was claimed that the prophet was buried in the tomb of ‘Sam and Ezmekshad’ at Kevil, close to Birs Nimrod. In the time of this saint, many Jews used to come to visit the tomb, and were even joined by some Muslims².

In the days of **St. John Chrysostom**, Ezekiel’s bones were moved from the land of Pontus to the city of Constantinople, on the twenty-second of December; when the saint gave a magnificent speech. The Roman Orthodox and the Latin celebrate this occasion, while our Coptic Orthodox Church celebrates his departure on the fifth of the month of Baramuda.

THE GOAL OF THIS BOOK

(1) In the first stage of the captivity of Judah, when Nebuchadnezzar refrained from destroying Jerusalem and the Temple, the people assumed that God would never allow the city and the Temple to be harmed; that captivity will not last long; and counted the words and prophecies of Jeremiah as untrue. For that reason, when Ezekiel got captivated, he made a point of settling down amid the captives; and

¹ *The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 5, p. 314.*

² *The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol.5, p. 316.*

purchased a house for him, to confirm to them that captivity will stay for a long time. He confirmed to them in some way or another, the truth of Jeremiah's prophecies - without mentioning his name - giving a portrait of the devastation to come, as a result of their abominations and their diversion to idol worship. He confirmed that the Lord's glory will depart from the Temple (Ez. 10:16-18; 11:23); and that Jerusalem will fall (Ez. 23:21).

(2) In this book, the prophet made it clear that "repentance" is the only way to draw the mercies of God (Ez. 18:27).

(3) As some people felt that they were unjustly punished, on account of the sins of their fathers, and that they were innocent victim of the abominations of the Jewish nation (Ez. 18; 33); the prophet revealed the evil that those people - men and women, together with their priests - were currently committing, even in the house of the Lord (Ez. 9:11). The punishment was therefore not for sins committed by a preceding generation, but for those committed by the contemporary one. He confirmed that every soul is responsible for its own sins, and not for those of others (Ez. 18:2); that no one is delivered on the expense of another (Ez. 14:20); and that man will be judged by his present position, and not by his past.

(4) Although the people felt that captivity was a temporary situation, and the Temple would never be destroyed, yet, they were tortured by a feeling of despair, as time dragged on, and conditions got worse. So the book came to proclaim the Lord's capability to offer a new heart and a new spirit to His children; and to give them the comfort to know that they will eventually return, and that divine justice will fall on their prevailing enemies.

(5) Having given them this hope, he brought them forth to the Messianic era; when the Lord Christ will come forward as the new David, to reign in place of the evil kings, and to bring all back to the one spirit. The book brought them forth to a new temple, different from the old one, that the prophet used to see in his young days; and in place of the small hill of Zion, he would see a mighty mountain, crowned by new holy and great buildings. As God forsook the old temple, because of their abominations (Ez. 10:19, 19; 11:22-24); He comes back to the new temple, to fill it with His glory (Ez. 43:1-6), set on the river of the holy water flowing from under the threshold of the temple, where the holy

altar is (Ez. 47); and along the banks of that river are all kinds of trees (congregations of saints who incessantly quench their thirst from the Holy Spirit). It is to be noted, that, in this book, instead of hearing about the passions of the Lord Christ, His death, and His rejection by the Jews, as was the case in the book of the prophet Isaiah; we are presented here with the glories of the new house of the Lord, and His holy temple; to grant the people joy and hope, after so much rebukes.

(6) He prophesied against certain nations, like Edom, Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, and Egypt, etc.

As to Tyre, he proclaimed its devastation (Ez. 26); because of its stand against Jerusalem; on the assumption that the desolation of Jerusalem would eventually lead to its own revival. That destiny was not expected, as Tyre has been a great city on the coast, that dated back to the year 2750 B.C.; and for defensive reasons, was moved to a rocky island facing it that carried the same name. That city of 142 acres used to receive the raw materials brought by ships from the whole known world to Phoenicia; then go back loaded by every kind of goods.

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, failed to conquer it after a war that lasted for 13 years; and so did Nebuchadnezzar after him. But God proclaimed through his prophet Ezekiel, that it would eventually fall, and its walls would crumble to the water; which was realized on the hands of Alexander the Great, who reached it by building a ridge from the main coast to the island, and defeated it, never to recover its fame again.

The Lord Christ visited it (Matthew 15:21), as well as the apostle Paul (Acts 21:3-7). In the thirteenth century, after the Muslims invaded and destroyed it, it was never rebuilt, but turned into a heap of rocks on which fishermen spread their nets to dry; a literal and detailed realization of Ezekiel's words: "*You shall be a place for spreading nets, and you shall never be rebuilt*" (Ez. 26:14)¹.

(7) This book included prophecies that concern the end of ages, and the time preceding the end of the world. We shall deal with all this in due time if God wills.

ITS FEATURES

¹ Cf. *Boyd's Bible Handbook*, p. 298.

(1) The prophet Ezekiel recorded his visions and his prophetic homilies, in a book that represents an integral unit, written in a unique way. He gave us a full report of what he saw, how he acted, and the words he uttered.

(2) As God called him to prophesy amid a stubborn, impudent, hard-hearted and a rebellious people (Ez. 2:3, 4), He provided him with a brave, unsuspecting spirit, a warm zeal for the glory of God, and a heart to confront with courage all oppressions and tribulations. His book is incomparable to other books, as far as zeal is concerned.

(3) He used several analogies and symbols. As an example of analogy, he likens Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh to two great eagles; and Jehoiachin to a branch of cedar, with its topmost young twig cropped off, and carried to Babylon (Ez. 17:1-10). As to prophetic symbols, they are of two kinds:

a- Practical symbols, practiced by the prophet before the eyes of the people (Ez. 37:16, 17); as when he joined two sticks together, as a symbol of the joining together of the two kingdoms of Ephraim and Judah.

b- Theoretical symbols, like prophesying about the dry bones (Ez. 37:1-10), and the measuring of the New Jerusalem with its temple (Ez. 40:).

Ezekiel was called the **creator of symbolism**¹, although he was preceded in this by Isaiah and Jeremiah. The later did it often, as when he went down to the potter's house, to see in it an example of the divine work, turning the clay into a vessel of dignity (Jeremiah 18); and as when he broke a potter's earthen flask in the sight of his people, in a prophecy that the people and the city will be so broken (Ez. 19).

(4) Ezekiel himself has been a symbol of the house of Israel (Ez. 12:6, 11; 4:3; 24:24, 27). He carried out strange acts: sometimes spending long days silent, and not uttering a single word; some other time referring to the calamities that will befall his people, by lying for 390 days on his left side, then for 40 days on the other side, eating by weight, and drinking water by measure. Sometimes cutting the hair of his head and beard, to burn one-third of it, strike one-third around with the sword, and scatter one-third in the wind. And sometime, he would

¹ Cf. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, London, 1970, p. 345.

break his silence to sing and play on an instrument (Ez. 33:32). When his beloved wife died, he was commanded by God to shed no tears, and he just sighed in his heart. Thus, the prophet bound his life to the tragedy of his people; and probably because of this, God called him “the son of Adam” about ninety times, having carried an image of the bitterness of the sin that weighed upon man, the son of Adam. God used this name to demonstrate to him his weakness and his need for Him as a support and a mystery of success¹. The Lord Christ was called “the Son of Man” about 80 times.

His actions led some later scholars to claim that he was probably suffering of certain mental sicknesses; and some of them even tried to diagnose them. While some others saw in him the greatest spiritual personality that ever appeared in human history²; as, from the beginning of his call, he was keen on putting all his life on the account of ministry; and to sanctify all the energies of his mind, his heart, and his thoughts, on the account of God’s word. Whether he spoke or remained silent, sighed or slept; ate, drank, drew, or played on a musical instrument; he does it not for his own sake, but for that of his prophetic work.

(5) The book of Ezekiel revealed the personality of that prophet, not only as a man of visions and revelations, but also as a man of the Holy Bible. He often referred to the five books of Moses and other books: He referred to the story of creation (Ez. 28:11-19); the Cherubim (Genesis 3:24); spoke of Noah, Daniel, and Job (Ez. 14:24; 28:3); and prophesied on Gog and Magog (Genesis 10; 1 Kings 1:5).

(6) This book came to embrace integral views, of which the following are examples:

a- This book, in talking about God, says that He is a jealous God, who saves His people, and enters with them into a covenant, for the sake of His holy Name. He does everything for the sake of His glory, yet, at the same time he speaks of His deep love for His people; seeing them like a girl, neglected and loathed by all. He cared for her, cleansed her, adorned her, and set her as a bride for Himself (Ez. 16). He works, not only for the sake of His Name, but also for that of His love for us, although the two are inseparable..

b- In this book, He proclaims his care for His people, as one

¹ *Boyd's Bible Handbook, Oregon 1983, P. 269.*

² *The Jerome Biblical Commentary, London, 1970, p. 344-345.*

nation and one bride, as a congregation worshipping one God. Yet, He does not disregard the individual, saying that no man will be judged by the fruits of the sins of another (Ez. 18:4, 29).

c- Together with harsh rebuke for sins, this book is rich with hope, even during the darkest moments.

d- Although this book shows great interest in the rites and priestly worship; yet, it concentrates on the inner life and on purifying the heart. There is no separation between the communal and spiritual worship.

e- Finally, in this book, the prophet Ezekiel is shown as a priest and the son of a priest, bound to the Temple, the sacrifice, and liturgies; as a prophet who proclaims some mysteries of the future; as a Seer, brought by the Spirit to heaven, to reveal the mysteries of divine greatness; as a theologian, who realizes the mysteries of faith, as a preacher who cares for repentance; and as a literary, a gifted Poet, and an artist, etc.

(7) While Isaiah has been the prophet of the nation who called for faith; and Jeremiah, has been the martyr prophet who called for love; Ezekiel, the prophet of captivity, called for hope. The prophecies of the first glorify the Savior Son; those of the second glorify the Father; the prophecies of the third glorify the Holy Spirit¹.

(8) More than any other prophet, Ezekiel got his messages through visions. His book is considered one of the most difficult in the Holy Bible. When a Jewish Rabbi once promised to give a complete interpretation of it, the Synagogue allotted 300 barrels of oil for his lamp; assuming that he would never complete his assignment².

(9) Ezekiel, the great prophet of captivity, differs from the other two prophets: Isaiah and Jeremiah, in two important aspects:

a- He did not deal with the government of Judah - namely the king and his statesmen; as he was neither a political nor a social reformer. But he cared for the salvation of every man as an individual, and for leading him to repent, without disregarding the communal aspect. He was, likewise, far from the royal court of Babylon, where the prophet Daniel lived.

b- For this same reason, he was unique among the prophets, for

¹ *Boyd's Bible Handbook*, p. 296.

² *Baker's Pictorial Intr.*, p. 192.

being an author, more than a speaker. He wrote to the whole “house of Israel,” to be read by the successive generations¹.

(10) This book reveals the unique multi-sided nature of the prophet Ezekiel²; having been a priest, a prophet, a shepherd, a seer, a theologian, a religious planner, a poet, and an artist.

As a **priest**, he was very keen on the purity of the rite, beside that of the individual, on the sound communal worship, and on abiding to the Law of God. The holiness of God dominated his life and thoughts.

As a **prophet** he exposed the sins of Israel, of Judah, and of the Gentiles; and proclaimed the chastisement of God. He called for repentance, revealing God’s promises; especially in the Messianic era.

As a **shepherd**, he shared the sufferings of the flock of God; warned them; and sought their comfort in the truth.

As a **seer**, he had several visions.

As a **theologian**, he clarified the theologian concepts behind the devastation of Jerusalem, and the reform.

As a **religious planner**, he established the spiritual basis of the society after captivity, for the sake of leading a fitting life.

As a **poet**, he gave us fantastic pieces of literature, as well as very touching lamentations.

As an **artist**, he provided several unusual portraits, filled with horrible secrets, which are sometimes difficult even to imagine³.

EZEKIEL AND THE RENEWAL OF THE HEART

If the prophet Jeremiah concentrated on the inner reform instead of the outer appearances; and on the circumcision of the heart and ear instead of the outer apparent circumcision; Ezekiel, likewise confirms the need for the renewal of the heart: *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them”* (Ez. 36:26-27). By the new heart, you will enjoy the new Temple, the new land, and the new life.

The signs of the new heart are:

1- To enjoy the Spirit of the Lord within him (Ez. 36:27).

¹ John Howard Raven: *Old Testament Introduction*, 1910, p. 205-6.

² Edward P. Blair: *The Illustrated Bible Handbook*, 1987, p. 177.

³ Henrietta C. Mears: *What the Bible is All About*, 1987, p. 216.

2- To carry the strength of walking in the statutes of the Lord and keeping His judgment (Ez. 36:27).

3- To find comfort in the divine promises (Ez. 36:28).

4- To be delivered from all uncleanness (Ez. 36:29).

5- To enjoy a state of fulfillment (Ez. 36:29, 30).

6- After being desolate, it will become like the garden of Eden (Ez. 36:35).

7- The surrounding nations shall testify to the increasing divine fruits in him (Ez. 36:36).

8- To enjoy a persistent growth (Ez. 36:37, 38).

BETWEEN EZEKIEL AND JEREMIAH

Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel was a married man and had a house. He was greatly influenced by Jeremiah; quoted his instructive rhetoric, and his short homilies; clarifying them and giving them his own literary touch; as for example¹:

	Jeremiah	Ezekiel
1- Destiny	1:13-15.	11:2-11; 24:3-14.
2- The two sisters	3:6-11.	23.
3- Forgiveness of transgressors	18:5-12.	18:21:32.
4- The wicked shepherds and the coming of a new king	23:1-6.	34:1-24.
5- Personal responsibility	31:29, 30.	18:2-31.
6- Spiritual creation	31:33, 34.	11:19, 20; 36:25-29.
7- Hope for the future	24.	11:15-21; 37:1-14.

The prophet Jeremiah differed from the prophet Ezekiel in that the former was more gentle and delicate in his rebukes; revealing the bitterness of his soul for the sake of his people; counting their sufferings and their iniquities as his own. Ezekiel, on the other hand, having come in a pitch dark period; and aware of the ferocity of those of authority toward Jeremiah; and their doubts in his prophecies, had to be harsh in his rebukes; as though judging and condemning; However, we can not disregard his great love for his people, and the bitterness of his soul for their sake. His book is the greatest in feeling the extent of iniquity against God; that made his words seem as though God would judge them more than He would do with other nations.

¹ *New Westminster Dict. of the Bible: Ezekiel.*

EZEKIEL AND THE VISIONS

Scholars believe that St. John was well aware of the book of Ezekiel, as there are the following analogies:

1- Compare the Living Creatures of Ezekiel (1:5, 10) with those in Revelation (4:5, 7).

2- Compare the mark on the forehead in Ezekiel (9:4) with that in Revelation (13:16).

The prophet Ezekiel ended his book by a description of the coming temple that came as a symbolic image of the heavenly temple or the higher Jerusalem, as it came in the book of Revelation:

	Ezekiel	Revelation
1- The holy mountain	40:2 .	21:1.
2- The holy city	27:27.	21:3.
3- The glory of God in it	43:2-5.	21:11.
4- The city is square in shape	48:16, 30.	21:16.
5- It has twelve gates	48:30 –34.	21:12, 13.
6- The River of life in it	47:1.	22:1.
7- Trees along its banks	47:7, 1.	22:2.

CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL:

1- **The “Branch of the Lord”** (Ez. 17:22; 24):In the book of Isaiah it came: *“In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing, for those of Israel who have escaped... when the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion”* (Isaiah 4:2, 4). The Lord will come down as a Branch, washing away by His blood the filth of our sins; so that we carry within us the fruit of the Spirit; and become by Him branches in which birds dwell.

2- **The Loving Shepherd** (Ez. 34), who seeks the prodigal, recovers the castaway, heals the broken, and comforts the wounded... saying: *“Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out”* (Ez. 34:11).

3- **David** (Ez. 34:23); who watches over his sheep, makes a covenant of peace with his people, uproots the wild beasts from the land, and makes His sanctuary among them (Ez. 34:25-28).

4- **A Garden of renown** (Ez. 34:29); His people shall no longer bear the shame; and will let them have in them fame and glory.

5- **Baptism and the era of grace** (Ez. 36:25-27)... Renewal of

human nature, and enjoyment of the new man.

6- The **Church of the New Testament**, as though set from dry bones (Ez. 37:1-10); and the new temple.

7- **Birth of Christ** from a virgin who remains a virgin (Ez. 44:2).

Origen spoke of the prophet Ezekiel as a symbol and an example of the Lord Christ¹:

1- The thirty years old Ezekiel, by the River of Chebar, saw the heavens open. And by the River Jordan, the heaven opened during the baptism of the thirty years old Lord Christ

2- Ezekiel was called “the son of Adam;” and the Lord Christ was called “the Son of Man,” to confirm His incarnation, His suffering passion and crucifixion for our sake.

3- The name “Ezekiel” means (the mighty power of God)... Who can represent the mighty power of God, but the Lord Christ Himself?!

4- Ezekiel dwelt among the captives; and the Lord Christ came among us to set us free from the captivation of sin.

5- The heaven opened before Ezekiel, and he saw the heavenly chariot; and the Lord opened for us His heavens to share with the heavenliness their praises, and to fill the world with angels.

GOD IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL²

As the people came under humiliation in the land of captivity; instead of returning to themselves, and referring what befell them to their own transgressions, they tended to doubt the ability and capability of God. That is why, as the prophet Ezekiel came to call for repentance, he revealed to them the greatness and might of God; together with some of His attributes:

1- God is glorious and awesome (Ez.1:25-28; 3:23).

2- God is holy, and does not stand iniquity (Ez.5:11; 36:23).

3- God is mighty everywhere (Ez.3:12-27; 5:5).

4- God has authority over all nations (Ez. 25:1-32; 32:32).

5- God is fair (Ez. 18:25; 33:30).

6- God is known for His able works (^:7, 14; 20:38).

7- God Himself is the Shepherd of His people (Ez. 34:11-16).

8- God grants the new heart and the new life (Ez. 36:25-32).

¹ *In Ezek. homily 1:4.*

² *Scripture Union: The Bible in Outline, 1989, p. 137.*

The book began by the proclamation of “God’s glory;” an expression that came several times in the first eleven chapters; then disappeared, to resume coming starting from chapter 43; as though to confirm that, when sins and abominations dominate, the glory of God would disappear; and His name would be blasphemed because of us. God, in His love created us to enjoy beholding His glory, and rejoice. But, through our rebellion, we lost this privilege. He did not forsake us, but sent His Only-begotten Son, to set for us the new spiritual temple, and to bring us into the fellowship of worthiness of His blood.

Such is the experience of the Church, and of every member in it. When we fall to sin, we bring grief to the Spirit of God, and lose His glory in us. By repentance we return to Him; and our glorified and crucified Christ, would be transfigured in us.

Some scholars believe that the book of Ezekiel started by the vision of the divine throne, to proclaim to Israel that God is glorified in heaven, and is in no need for the Temple they defiled. He rejects their Temple, their sacrifices, and their worship, as long as they are mingled with abominations¹.

SECTIONS OF THE BOOK

This book carries as all-prophetical books two integral sections; namely: Judgment or verdict of perdition (Chapters 1 to 24); then salvation, after chastening the nations (Chapters 25 to 48). But we can divide this book into six main sections:

1- A call for Ezekiel	1-3.
2- Warnings before the fall of Jerusalem	4-12.
3- Iniquities of Israel and Jerusalem	13-24.
4- Prophecies against the nations	25-32.
5- Prophecies about the return from captivity	33-39.
6- Restoration of the Temple and Jerusalem	40-48.

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The first section: A call to Ezekiel

1- 3 Calling Ezekiel to prophetic work, after the appearance of a fiery chariot. Then his receiving the Word of God as a scroll he ate, that filled his stomach, and was in his mouth like honey in sweetness.

¹ See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol.5, P.315.

The second section: Warnings before the fall of Jerusalem

First part of the warnings:

4-5 Prophecies through symbolic acts (Portraying Jerusalem on a tablet; lying on one side; eating by weight and drinking by measure, and cutting the hair of his head and beard).

6-7 Speaking clearly about the fruit of the iniquities of Judah.

8-11 Getting carried by the Spirit to Jerusalem to behold the abominations as they entered into the house of God; the city burned by fire; and the Lord departs from His house; with a promise to return, and to grant them the new heart and the new spirit.

Second part of the warnings:

12 Other symbolic prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity; together with a reference to the destiny of King Hezekiah.

The third section: The iniquities of Israel and Judah

13 Confirmation of the realization of the prophecy, and rejection of the false prophets (Departing from his place to another place as a sign of going into captivity; digging into the wall while covering his face, so as not to see; and eating his bread with quaking, and drinking his water with trembling and anxiety).

14 The personal responsibility for one's transgressions.

15 Israel as it became a fruitless vine; like a vine branch useful only for fire.

16 Likening Israel to a loathsome and forsaken girl, who, after God beautified and betrothed to Himself, went back to play the harlot behind His back.

17 Judah betrays the king of Babylon, and resorts to Egypt; God sends the King of Babylon to chasten it.

18 Man is responsible for his own actions.

19 A lamentation for the princes of Israel.

20-24 The iniquities of Israel and Judah are exposed in the form of poetry; or through symbols, (like the Blacksmith who blows fire on minerals to melt them, and purify them from dross. The two sisters; and the death of the prophet's wife).

The fourth section: Prophecies against the nations for their chastisement

25-32 Prophecies against Amon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, and Egypt, because they rejoiced in heart with disdain for what befell the land of Israel.

The fifth section: Prophecies concerning the return from captivity

33-39 God speaks of taking over Himself the care for His people (34); of rebuilding their cities (36); of raising His people as though from the dead (37); of granting them the spirit of unity; and of the perdition of Gog and his army, as a sign of God's triumph over the idols (38, 39).

The sixth section: Restoration of the Temple and Jerusalem

40-48 The new temple, the new land, and the new river in which all come to it will be baptized.

THE FIRST SECTION

A CALL TO EZEKIEL

EZEKIEL 1 - 3

CHAPTER 1

THE FIERY CHARIOT

The book begins by a vision of the divine throne, to confirm to His people that He is longing for them to partake with the heavenliness of the enjoyment of His glory; and from another aspect, that He is in no need for the Temple they have defiled, and for their worship and offerings, unless their hearts are sanctified for Him, prepared for His dwelling.

This chapter used to have a special awe among the Jews; that no one was allowed to read or to publicly interpret, on account that it dealt with the mysteries of the throne of God¹.

An Introduction	1-3.
1- The wind, the cloud, and the fire	4.
2- The four Living Creatures	5-14.
3- The wheels	15-21.
4- The firmament	22-25.
5- The throne and the One sitting on it	26-27.
6- The rainbow	28.

AN INTRODUCTION

The prophet Ezekiel started his book by giving the date of the first divine vision proclaimed to him; his dwelling place at that time; and the situation prevailing around him..

He says: “*In the thirtieth year*” (Ez. 1:1). By that he either meant, when he reached his thirtieth year of age, and became a priest, albeit with no priestly work; or he meant the thirtieth year after King Joshua started the restoration of the Temple, and the religious reform; or he probably meant the thirtieth year of the reign of Naboplassar the father of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and founder of the Babylonian Empire. At that time Ezekiel was dwelling by the River Chebar near Tel Abib² (Ez. 3:15).

¹ *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, p. 316.

² *TEL-ABIB*: “mound or hill of ears of grain.” *The place of Ezekiel's residence among the Jewish captives in Babylonia, on the Chebar, a branch of the Euphrates (Ezek 3:15); the nahr Malcha, Nebuchadnezzar's royal canal. Tel-abib doubtless derives its name from the fertility of*

Ezekiel reached the legal age to start his priestly work; to enter into the sanctuaries, to offer the sacrifices, to partake of the daily liturgies, to celebrate feasts, and to enjoy the joyful praises. But, unfortunately, he was deprived of all that because of captivity. So he was sitting by the River Chebar, mourning for the conditions of his country and people, and that of the house of the Lord; as though reciting the psalm that says:

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive required of us a song, and those who plundered us required of us mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion’! How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget her skill!!”
(Psalm 136 (137)).

As the priest’s soul was so embittered, the Spirit raised him up to heaven, to bring him up to the higher Jerusalem to enjoy the everlasting temple; not to behold the ark of the covenant, the golden lamp-stand, and the altar of incense etc.; but to behold the fiery divine chariot, and the fiery divine throne. The heavens were opened (Ez. 1:1) before him to behold the divine mysteries, to fill his soul in the circumstances surrounding him, with comfort, as he sees through them the human nature renewed by the fiery Holy Spirit, granted to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the holy Baptism, that became a fiery chariot carrying God Himself.

Heavens were opened before the captive prophet Ezekiel, to bring him as though to the throne of the Almighty God; to let him know that human affairs do not go haphazardly, but are directed by an awesome divine ordinance; as the Almighty God cares for everything that concerns man’s life. That is the source of our comfort amid tribulations.

❖ I behold the heavens open; while others do not! No one should think that heavens were opened in the simple material sense. But we, sitting here, may behold heavens opened and closed, according to the different degrees of our worthiness. Perfect faith opens the heavens,

the valley, rich in grain, by which it was surrounded. (Fausset's Bible Dictionary. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois.)

while doubt closes them¹.

St. Jerome

This first vision, that will be repeated, came to serve the following goals:

(1) To comfort the broken soul of Ezekiel, to let him say together with the Psalmist: *“In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comfort delight my soul”* (Ps 94:19). *“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ”* (2 Cor. 1:5). That is why the apostle Paul saw Paradise, most probably while being stoned in Lystra; and the apostle John was abducted to the Lord’s day, while exiled on the Island of Patmos.

(2) The vision came as fitting to the circumstances prevailing in the ministry; as God grants His visions and His gifts according to the needs for His vine. When God encountered Moses, as the first leader of His people, to cross with them from the fierce servitude to the wilderness; then to bring them over through Joshua to the land of freedom; He appeared to Moses in the form of a burning yet not consumed thorny bush; as though to proclaim the mystery of the divine incarnation, the passion, and the resurrection². As though, there is no setting forth for the Church, except through the work of salvation by Christ, the incarnate, the crucified and the resurrected from the dead. The miracles that accompanied Moses also came to confirm the same thing³. But here, the souls of the people were so broken up, to see the Chaldeans touring with the magnificent and luxurious procession of their god ‘Bel’ or ‘Marduk’⁴ through the streets of their capital; while the people of Israel were deprived of their Temple and of hearing and uttering their joyful praises. Their misery was counted as being that of their God. That is why God did not proclaim Himself in a simple

¹ Hom., 75.

² Cf. our Book on Exodus, 1981, chapter 2 (in Arabic).

³ Ibid, p. 40-42.

⁴ Bel (bal; Akkad. Belu, cognate of Heb. ba'al, "lord"). The patron god of Babylon (Jer 51:44) identified with Marduk, head of the Babylonian pantheon. The Hebrews called him Merodach. As a sun-god his festival was celebrated in the spring at the beginning of the year, since the sun's rays were then most potent in reviving nature. The Babylonians paid him supreme tribute and exalted him to the headship of their pantheon shortly after 2000 B.C. According to Enuma elish, the Babylonian account of creation, Marduk was elevated to this superior position because of his slaying Tiamat, the goddess of chaos. He was worshiped in Esagila, the great temple at Babylon. (From The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois.)

burning bush, but through a fiery chariot filled with glory and splendor; It is as though He intended to confirm to His children and people, that His glory fills the heaven and earth, even during the moments, when He allows His people to be chastised by the nations.

(3) This vision proclaims the gift of God to the human nature that is sanctified by the divine incarnation. The fiery chariot represents the holy Church as a divine throne; the catholic (universal) Church; as well as the soul of the believer, who became a member in the Church of God, and a fiery chariot that carries God within it, through receiving the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments of Baptism and 'Mayron,' and surrendering his life in God's hands, to work persistently in it.

(4) God probably intended to proclaim to the prophet Ezekiel, how the minister of God should be. If God is a consuming fire, so also His minister should be "a flame of fire" (Ps 104:4). He is likened to a fiery chariot, so as, by the fiery Holy Spirit, he would be capable of working on God's account. Concerning this **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Whoever practices a leading role, should have more splendor than a bright star; his life should be blameless, for everyone to behold and follow suit¹.]

(5) Before presenting the vision, it is said: "*The hand of God was upon him*" (Ez. 1:3). This phrase was the prophet's favorite; if, because of captivity, he was deprived of his natural right to practice his priestly work; yet the hand of God stretched to bless him and to grant him the Spirit of prophecy. He is directly called by God to behold the mysteries of His kingdom, and to realize God's plan with the whole humanity all along the generations till the end of ages. He was appointed by God to minister to the heavenly sanctuaries.

(6) In his first homily on the book of Ezekiel, **Origen** believes that Ezekiel here, represents the Lord Christ in the moments of His Baptism. He, the true Word, truly became a Son of Man. He came to us, we the captives, not to show us the fiery chariot, but to lead us by His Holy Spirit through the water of Baptism, by the power of His cross, to His divine throne. He came to open His heavens before us, to find for us a place in the bosom of His Father, where to settle down, and rest forever. He transforms His Church into a fiery chariot, by His fiery

¹ الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 654.

Spirit, for us all to set forth by our hearts to the throne of His grace, to experience the advance payment of His glory, until the time when we can behold Him face to face.

In order to comprehend these things, we shall have to enter into some details of that vision, that constituted six things: The whirlwind, the cloud, the fire, the four Living Creatures, the wheels, the firmament, the likeness of the throne, the One sitting on it, and finally the rainbow. All these carry heavenly secrets concerning the heavenly life, the holy Church, as well as the inner life of the believer, especially the minister of God. And as the prophet is trying in this chapter to describe the indescribable, he often uses the word “the likeness of;” as though the human language, expressions, and the symbols are no more helping him to express what he saw.

1- THE WHIRLWIND, THE CLOUD, AND THE FIRE

“Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire” (Ez:1:4).

Whenever the glory of the Lord is proclaimed, the following three things mostly appear: the rushing wind, the great cloud, and the fire engulfing itself; that were all strongly demonstrated on the day of the Pentecost at the upper room of Zion, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples, to establish the Church of the New Testament. *“Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:2, 3).* The rushing mighty wind that filled the whole house, is a sign of filling the Church with the divine Spirit; The fire engulfing itself through the fiery tongues are those that set the hearts of believers aflame with a persistent divine fire. And the great cloud is the congregation of disciples, who were sanctified to become a cloud of witnesses to the Lord (Heb 12:1).

Concerning the **rushing wind**, we notice that that word ‘*ruah*’ in Hebrew, is translated as wind, spirit, or soul, according to the text¹. The connection between ‘wind’ and ‘spirit’ is not confined to the limit of the

¹ J. Hastings: *Dict. of the Bible*, N.Y.1977, p. 1037.

word; as the 'wind' for the Jews, was not just a natural phenomenon, but mostly carries the sense of divine energy, proclaimed in nature¹. In the Old Testament, the divine presence was almost always connected to the rushing wind. "*The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind*" (Job 38:1). The Lord addressed Moses "*from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice (whirlwind)*" (Deuteronomy 5:22); and as Elijah stood on the mountain before the Lord, "*The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord*" (1 Kings 19:11). That is why the prophet Nahum says: "*The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm; and the clouds are the dust of His feet*" (Nahum 1:3). And the Psalmist says: "*Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him*" (Ps 50:3).

St. Augustine comments on these words of the Psalmist, saying: [This will, no doubt, create a kind of segregation. It is the segregation that they do not expect, as the nets are broken before they bring them to the shore (Luke 5:6). In the segregation, there would be a discernment between the good and the wicked².] It is as though the whirlwind has taken another concept in the mind of **St. Augustine**. As long as we are still in this world, we are as though fishes in a net, with no distinction between the righteous and the wicked. But once it is brought to the shore - namely to the great day of the Lord, the whirlwind will segregate these from those.

This segregation or discernment, accompanying the coming of the great day of the Lord, is happening now within the heart. In the day of the Pentecost, as the whirlwind blew, it granted the Church the Spirit of discernment, not to condemn the wicked outside it, but to spiritually judge those inside it; to separate between the wicked, who is holding fast to his wickedness, from the simple and pure souls; Every member will carry inside him as well, the spirit of discernment, that condemns the evil or weakness to which he falls; to walk in the light, and to get away from the darkness. He judges himself, and condemns his inner depths, and his behavior, before getting judged and condemned from outside.

As to the book of Ezekiel, the prophet felt the whirlwind coming out of the north (Ez. 1:4). It is as though the Lord confirms that he

¹ *J. Hastings: Dict. of the Bible, N.Y.1977, p. 1037.*

² *Augustine: On Ps 50:3.*

(blows) on His people the spirit of discernment, to chasten them for their evil, and to bring them through captivity and suffering into the pure life. The whirlwind came out of the north; as north for the Jews refers to affliction and uncertainty. Whenever the hot north wind blows, plagues would follow and destruction would occur. While the false prophets prophesied smooth things (Is 30:10), saying: *“peace, peace!, when there is no peace”* (Jeremiah 8:11), in order to calm down the fear of the people, and to gain the favor of the leaders, at the expense of the truth; the prophets uttered the plain truth, even if it would hurt. That is what the prophet Ezekiel confirms, when he says that the Lord Himself is coming to chastise, as though in a whirlwind that comes out of the north.

The Lord Christ connected between the divine Spirit and the whirlwind, in a new theological concept, by saying: *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit”* (John 3:8). He reveals that the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth through Baptism is a secret unseen one; but its activity and action is realized in the believer’s life. It blows as a rushing wind to shake the old foundations of the heart, to set out of it a new sanctuary. The Spirit keeps on blowing inside us, as though it is not coming from outside, but is dwelling within, working on the growth of our new man. We feel it working in us, but we do not comprehend its mysteries. That was how the divine Spirit worked, even in the Old Testament, through chastising by enemies coming from the north, in a secret way, that people could not comprehend, It is the work of God in them after their return to Him.

As to the great cloud; from the old days, the divine presence had been connected to clouds. As the people came out into the wilderness, *“the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way”* (Exod 13:21). The apostle Paul saw in that, a symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism (1 Cor 6:2); as it brings us from the servitude, to the freedom of the glory of the children of God. In several occasions, as Moses talked to God, the glory of God appeared in the cloud (Exod 16:10; 19:9). And when Moses set a tabernacle outside the camp to meet with God there, *“When Moses entered the tabernacle, the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door”* (Exod 33:9, 10). When the tabernacle was dedicated, *“the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord*

filled the tabernacle” (Exod 40:34). And when the temple was built to replace the tabernacle of meeting; on the day of its dedication, “*The priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord*” (1 kings 8:11). In the New Testament, as the Lord Christ ascended together with three of His disciples on the mountain of Tabor, and Moses and Elijah appeared talking to Him, “*a bright cloud overshadowed them*” (Mat 17:5). And in the book of Revelation we read about the second advent of the Lord¹: “*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him*” (Rev 1:7). So what do the clouds refer to?

a- **SS. Cyril the Great, Augustine, and Jerome**, believe that the cloud symbolizes the humanity of the Lord Christ that was apparent to us, while His Deity was hidden from our sight. His appearance in the last day, with the cloud, implies that the glory of His Deity, on Judgment day, will be hidden from the wicked that they couldn’t enjoy it; while the righteous will enjoy the glories of the incarnated God, and His splendor will be apparent to them.

b- **Pope Dionysius of Alexandria** believes that the cloud refers to the uncountable congregation of angels, that appear surrounding the Lord on the day of His coming.

c- **St. Augustine** believes that the cloud refers to the congregation of preachers; saying: [The Lord Christ, the Word of God, is in the cloud, namely in those preaching the Truth².] He even believes that every member of the Church represents a cloud, in which the Lord Christ comes; saying: [He comes now in His members, as though in the cloud; or comes in the Church, which is the great cloud³.]

d- **St. Ambrose** believes that the cloud that overshadows the Church is the congregation of prophets, who presented to her the person of the Lord Christ through their prophesies; saying: [Moses and Joshua were two clouds. The saints are also clouds: “*Who are those who fly like a cloud, and like doves to their roosts?*” (Is 60:8). Isaiah and Ezekiel are two clouds above me: the first revealed to me the holiness of the Trinity

¹ للمؤلف: رؤيا يوحنا اللاهوتي، 1979، ص17، 16.

² On Ps. 60:2.

³ Ad Hesych. 45.

through the Cherubim and the Seraphim. All the prophets are clouds, in which the Lord Christ came. In the Song of Solomon, He came as a pure beloved cloud, glittering with the joy of the Groom. He came riding on a swift cloud; incarnated from the Virgin; seen by the prophet coming as a cloud from the east (Is 19:1). He truly called Him a light swift cloud;” with nothing that belongs to the earth to weigh Him down¹.]

e- In talking about the bright cloud that appeared, as the Lord Christ was transfigured, **Origen** says: [I dare to say that our Savior, likewise, is the bright cloud that overshadows the Gospel, the Law, and the prophets, they were granted the gift of comprehension, those who beheld His light in the Gospel, the Law and the prophets².]

As to the raging fire, it was said that the Lord Himself is a consuming fire (Heb. 1:9), and that His ministers are likewise “flames of fire” (Ps 104:4). So, the appearance of the divine chariot through a raging fire, proclaims the presence of God, the Fire that burns the thorns that strangle the soul; yet grants it at the same time, an inner enlightenment to become like lightening, with “*brightness all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.*”

St. Cyril of Jerusalem spoke of the fiery Holy Spirit that comes to the human soul through Baptism, saying: [Why marvel?! Take a veal example that, although poor and common, yet is suitable for the simple ones. If fire passes through a piece of iron to melt it completely; so, whoever is cold will become aflame, and whoever is black will turn bright. If fire, which is just a form of matter, penetrates iron - which is also a form of matter - and act in it without hindrance; So why marvel, that the Holy Spirit penetrates the inner depths of the soul?!³]

And **St. John Chrysostom** says: [As the power of fire, when applied to gold ore, mixed with dust, turns it into pure gold; So also, and even more so, the Holy Spirit works in Baptism within those whom He cleanses, turning them from mud, into what is more pure than gold. When the Holy Spirit dwells like fire in our souls, He burns, at first, the image of the earthly, to give that of the heavenly; to become like a

¹ PL 15 ; 1814.

² Sunday Sermons of the Great Frs, vol 2 ,1964, p. 42.

³ Cat. Lect. 17,14.

splendid coin, emerging bright out of the melting furnaces¹.]

St. Augustine comments on the words of the Psalmist: “A fire goes before Him” (Ps 97:3), saying: [Does this frighten you? Let us change; then we shall not be afraid! The straw may fear the fire, but what can the fire do to gold?!²] And he also comments on the phrase: “For You, O God, have proved us; You have refined us as silver is refined” (Ps 66:10), saying: [You did not consume us like straw, but refined us like silver. Your fire did not turn us into ashes, but cleansed us from defilements³.]

2- THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

We have already dealt in our interpretation of the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation⁴ with those heavenly beings, and said that they are the ranks of the Cherubim and the Seraphim; and referred in some detail, to their dignity, their work, their form, and to what they symbolize. But here, we add the following points:

a- In the book of Revelation, St. John saw for every creature, just one face; namely, he saw only four faces, for all of the four creatures. The prophet Ezekiel, on the other hand, said that he saw for each of the four Living Creatures, four faces; one on each side. The reason for this controversy, is probably because the first looked at those creatures from one side, while the other looked at them from all sides; having seen the chariot in a condition of movement from all sides.

These faces, according to **St. John Chrysostom**, refer to the intercession of these spiritual beings on behalf of mankind (the likeness of the face of a man); of wild animals (the likeness of the face of a lion); of the beasts of the field (the likeness of the face of an ox); and of the birds of the air (the likeness of the face of an eagle); on account of their closeness to God, more so than all other heavenly spirituals.

If we take the interpretation of **St. Gregory of Nyssa** and that of **Origen**, we see in the fiery chariot, the soul, sanctified with all its energies, to be worthy of carrying the divine throne. The lion refers to the power of anger; the ox to that of lust; the man to reason; and the

¹ المؤلف: الحب الإلهي ، ص847.

² On Ps. 50.

³ On Ps. 66;10.

⁴ المؤلف: رؤيا يوحنا اللاهوتي، 1979، ص62-66.

eagle to spirituality. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul; inflaming our energies by His fire, not to destroy, but to sanctify them, and to integrate them together into what is like a fiery chariot that carries God in it!

And if we take the interpretations of **St. Victorianus**¹ and that of **St. Irenaeus**, we see in those faces a reference to the four gospels that bring the soul to salvation, to enjoy the kingdom, not as something outside it, but rather within it; to become a sanctuary to the Lord.

Taking the interpretation of **St. Jerome**, we see that the mystery of carrying God - the consuming Fire - lies in our enjoyment of divine salvation through the incarnation (the likeness of the face of a man); the crucifixion (the ox); the resurrection (the lion); and the ascension (the eagle). By this mystery, that of the incarnate Lord, who was crucified, risen from the dead, and ascended to heaven, the soul sets forth as a fiery chariot, to carry, by the Holy Spirit, the divine life inside it.

Finally, if these four creatures represent the holy Church, that carries the divine life inside her; these four are the 'Bishops,' the 'Priests,' the 'deacons,' and the congregation. These are the main pillars working together on the account of the Lord Christ. Disturbance in any of them, would let the Church lose its balance, and does harm to its mission. If one pillar loses its strength or its cooperation with the other pillars, the whole building would crumble down. The Church is not centered on a Bishop, a Priest, a deacon, or a member of the congregation; but it is an integral and interacting life.

b- Each creature appears with four wings, while, in the book of Revelation, each has six wings. This difference probably refers to what Ezekiel called a 'firmament' above the heads of the Living Creatures; It is as though each one of these Living Creatures, raises two of his wings over his head in the form of a firmament, in order to shade his eyes before the splendor of God's glory. By this action, these two wings are not apparent; but only the other four are. As such will be the soul, especially that of a God's minister, who enjoys the life of fellowship with God; it will become like a cherub with six wings, covering itself with two, flies towards God with two, and covers its eyes with the other two before the splendor of God's greatness! The prophet Ezekiel noticed

¹ *Bishop of Pateu, was martyred on 304.*

that the wings of the cherub are connected to one another. Thus if the cherubim represent the highest of the heavenly ranks, their holy and fiery life, would not be qualified to carry the divine throne, except by their union with one another [v.9]. That is what made **St. Macarius the Great** say, that man's salvation lies in the life of others; He can't enjoy salvation, isolated from his fellow men, but through being a member together with them, in the one body to the one Head.

c- *"Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze"* (Ez. 1:7). The straight legs represent the straightness of the spiritual man, whose soles are like burnished bronze; that flatten the thorns, and sparkle like the heavenly splendor, without getting spoiled by the dirt of the world. The true believer fearlessly treads on the world, heading toward heaven without getting distracted by the affairs of the world.

d- *"They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides"* (Ez. 1:8). The spiritual man lives flying in the heavens, as though by the wings of the Spirit; with his hands always ready to work on the account of the kingdom of God, to serve all men. The presence of hands under the wings probably means that the heavenliness worship God and minister to mankind; they have the spirit of worship and ministry together!

e- *"Their wings touched one another"* (Ez. 1:9); namely, all worship together with the spirit of love, harmony, and unity.

f- The prophet looked at these Living Creatures, to see their faces on all sides, as though with no back; capable of moving in all directions without turning aside (Ez. 1:9). It is fitting for the bearer of the divine throne, having entered into the perfection of glory, to have no back, but to be all-faces, and all eyes, always beholding God with no hindrance. That is why when the people transgressed against God, He admonished them, saying: *"They have turned their back to Me, and not their faces"* (Jer 2:27), an expression that He often used on the tongue of the prophet Jeremiah (7:24; 18:17; 32:33). It is as though the prophet Ezekiel came to use the words of Jeremiah in another form. Instead of rebuking the people for turning their back and not their face to God, he is exhorting them to become like those heavenly creatures, who have no back altogether, but their whole life, in the Lord, is all faces and encounters.

The prophet describes their movement, saying: “*They went wherever the Spirit wanted to go*” (Ez. 1:12). The Holy Spirit is leading the divine procession; leading both the heavenliness and the earthliness in Truth. He repeats the word “go,” to confirm the importance of our commitment to go according to the plan of the Holy Spirit, and under His leadership, with no diversion to the right or to the left.

g- The prophet saw those Living Creatures always on the move in a harmonious way; appearing like burning coals on fire; like torches, that flash with lightning (Ez. 1:13). This is a living portrait of God’s work in us, making us always on the move toward Him, by the holy fiery Spirit; like burning fire; and enlightens us that we become like bright torches filled with His splendor.

h- Their movement produced noise like that of many waters; like the noise of an army. Such is the work of God in our life, turning the souls into a mighty army, undefeatable by the devil and his hosts. That is why **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says to the Catechumens: [Everyone of you comes and presents himself before the Lord, in the presence of uncountable hosts of angels. The Holy Spirit puts a sign on your souls, to assign you as soldiers in the army of the great King¹.] And **Fr. Theodore of Mesopotamia** says: [Now you are chosen for the kingdom of God; and are recognized as soldiers in the army of the King of heaven².]

I- In the tenth chapter, the prophet Ezekiel called the Living Creature ‘a cherub.’ It is amazing how the cherub is closely connected to our salvation. He appeared in the first book of the Bible, holding a flaming sword to guard the way to Paradise, to block man’s way to the tree of life; as the fallen nature of man is not capable of reaching the source of life. He also appeared in the last book of the holy Bible, together with the twenty-four Presbyters, singing the praise of the Lamb, the praise of our salvation (Rev 5:9); as man gained the right of entering heaven itself; when his nature became glorified in Christ Jesus the true Lamb. In between the beginning of the Holy Bible and its end, two cherubs also appear over the ark of testimony in the tabernacle and the Temple, as a sign of God’s presence; through which God used to talk to His prophet Moses. The presence of two cherubs over the ark of

¹ P G 33 ; 428.

² Theodore of Mopseustia ; Cat. Hom., 13:17.

testimony, that represents God's throne; refers to the fact that God, who dwells in the midst of His people, talks to them, and deals with them through mercy and love. The presence of two of them, refers to the role of the heavenliness; praying for our sake, and ministering to those who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:14). The figure of the cherub drawn on the tabernacle and the veil, were close to that of a winged man; a proclamation of how close, the human nature is to the divine presence.

Man was familiar with the cherub; he was known by the nations, especially the Chaldeans, although they added to it forms of their own; the way the rest of the nations did to all the facts of faith, that they orally received by tradition, then tainted them by their own diverted thoughts.

Thus, when we see the cherub, we remember our human nature, that enjoyed salvation, through its union with God in our Lord Jesus Christ, by His Holy Spirit. His four faces refer to the sanctification of our new nature with all its aspects: the mental (face of man), the spiritual (eagle), work (ox), and authority (lion).

j- **St. Clement of Alexandria** followed the lead of the Jew Philo, saying that the word "cherub" means "knowledge," namely, that through spiritual knowledge, our life becomes a chariot that carries God inside it. This is also said by **St. Jerome**¹, who saw in the cherub a symbol of the store of knowledge that works in our nature, to lift it up and set forth with it among the heavenly hosts. It works in our nature, that has the upper hand over lusts like a lion, soars up high like an eagle, works and strives like an ox, and reasons like man. We get this same knowledge from the four gospels; as said by the same saint: [Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are the quartet team of God; the true cherubs, or the store of knowledge; whose bodies are filled with eyes, and glitters like lightening... Their legs are straight and high; their backs are winged; ready to fly in all directions. Each of them is touching and holding the other, like wheels inside wheels, rolling forward, and going according to the will of the Holy Spirit².]

k- *"The Living Creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightening"* (Ez. 1:14); probably referring by this to the ministry of the heavenliness, who are sent to us, but would soon rush

¹ Epist. 53 :9.

² On Ps. , hom 10.

back to where the divine throne is, to enjoy beholding God. So is also the true believer, whose heart and mind are aflame with longing toward his Savior, from time to time he would rush back with all his feelings, like lightening, to enjoy beholding Him, proclaiming together with the apostle:..." *I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*" (Phil 1:23).

3- THE WHEELS

"Now as I looked at the Living Creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their works was like the color of Beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their works was, as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went toward anyone of four directions. They did not turn aside as they went. As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them. When the Living Creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the Living Creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels lifted up. Wherever the Spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the Spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the Living Creatures was in the wheels" (Ez. 1:15-20).

a- What are these wheels that are on the earth, that carry inside it the spirit of the Living Creatures; that move in harmony with them; yet, at the same time, they are so high, awesome and full of eyes; their appearance is like the color of beryl; a wheel in the middle of a wheel? **St. Jerome** answers, saying: [The two wheels are the two Testaments, the Old and the New: The old moves in the New, and the New moves in the Old¹.] He proves his view by quoting what came in the tenth chapter (according to the Septuagint version): *"Those wheels were called, in my hearing, 'Gelgel'"* (Ez. 10:13 LXX). The word "Gilgel" here is not the word "Gilgal," that means "rolling" (Deut 11:30) or a circle. The first is formed of two words "Gel" and "Gel," which means "a proclamation²." It is as though, the voice that the prophet Ezekiel heard coming out of the wheels is 'the proclamation of the New Testament and the proclamation of the Old Testament.' The two Testaments melded together to proclaim the secret of salvation for humanity by the Lord

¹ On Ps. , hom 25.

² On the Holy Spirit 3:21.

Christ, the center of the Holy Bible. Concerning this, **St. Ambrose** says: [The prophet saw a wheel moving within a wheel. This vision, no doubt, does not refer to something carnal, but to the grace of the two Testaments. The wheel within a wheel, is life under the Law, and life through grace, as within the Church grace included the Law¹.] And **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The two Testaments are connected together and melded to each other².] The Old Testament reveals the mysteries of the New Testament, and clarifies them through symbols and prophecies; and the New Testament reveals the mysteries of the old Testament, that were hidden behind shadows.

He saw the wheels on the earth, but their rims were high and awesome; as though the word of God was presented in the two Testaments in our human language, to comprehend and to live, while we are on earth. Yet they are, at the same time, high and awesome, they lift the soul up to the heavenliness, and help us enter into the mysteries that are filled with awe. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [It is not possible for him who was granted the activity of the word of God, to remain in this present lowness; but would rather acquire two wings to set forth to the exalted places, to discover the limitless light of goodness.]

b- The wheels are connected to the earth; as the fiery chariot is connected to us, humans; to carry us up from the dirt of this world, to the heavenly fiery life.

That is the chariot of God, whose way is said to be in the sanctuary, as well as in the sea (Ps 77); God of both heaven and earth together; glorified by all.

c- The connection of the wheels to the earth confirms that God is the Controller and Maker of history; who works in all ages. The wheel of his love and care keeps rolling incessantly, even if man does not comprehend their mysteries and wisdom.

d- The appearance of the wheels is like the color of beryl - a kind of stone known for its great hardness, and for its light green color. It is the tenth stone on the breastplate of the High Priest (Exod 28:20); with which he enters into the sanctuaries of God. It is as though, God grants the soul both hardness and strength to confront all the wars of the devil;

¹ In Matt, hom., 47:4.

² In Ioan ,hom 1,6.

the light green color refers to the fruits it presents in man's life; turning his heart into joyful Paradise. Its presence on the breast of the High Priest, reveals the work of the word in us, inscribing our names on the breast of the Lord Christ, Bishop of our souls, who is in His Father's bosom interceding for us with His blood, to bring us to the bosom of His Father. Finally, this stone is one of the stones that adorn the foundations of the walls of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:20). It is as though the word of God is the adornment of the bride, who forever enjoys the entrance into the chambers of the Groom.

Thus, the word of God is the high-priced precious stone that should be acquired by the priest, the monk, and members of the congregation, as the source of conquest, victory, and union with the Lord Christ, and of the entrance into the heavenly life. That is why, when **Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov** wrote his book "The Arena¹," introducing a program for monastic life in connection with Church Fathers, he started it by drawing the attention of monks to the Holy Bible and the biblical commandments; saying that the old saintly monk fathers called the monastic life, as that which live according to the commandments of the gospel. **St. John of the Ladder** identifies the monk as someone who is guided only by God's commandments and His word, all the time, everywhere, and in every situation². The monks who were under **St. Pachomius the Great**, were committed to learn the Gospel by heart; so that the statutes of the incarnate God, would be always like a permanently opened book in the memory of the monk, seen by the eyes of the soul, and printed on it to be accomplished easily, and without failure³. The blessed elder **Seraphim of Sarov** says: [We should so train ourselves that the mind as it were swims in the law of the Lord by which we must guided and govern and rule our life⁴.]

e- "Their rims are full of eyes; all around the four of them" (Ez. 1:18). The spiritual person carries the spirit of discernment and wisdom, full of eyes. These rims are high and awesome (Ez. 1:18); the spiritual man is characterized by spiritual exaltness; to be counted in the eyes of

¹ *Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov: The Arena, An offering to Contemporary Monasticism, Madras, 1970, chapter 1.*

² *Ladder 1:4.*

³ *Cf. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov: The Arena, An offering to Contemporary Monasticism, Madras, 1970, chapter 3.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

heaven, as exalted and dignified. He is so high, that the devil is not capable of getting him; and awesome; because the Spirit of the Lord in him, is greater than all the energies of the devil.

4- THE FIRMAMENT

“The likeness of the firmament above the head of the Living Creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads” (Ez. 1:22). He saw above the heads of those living heavenly creation, the likeness of the firmament of heaven. Thus, as the believer offers all his energies: physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual, as tools of righteousness, sanctified to God; his life would turn into the likeness of a heavenly firmament that overshadows his inner heart.

Concerning this, **St. John Saba** says: [Heaven will be inside you if you are pure; and you will behold the angels in it, radiant with joy. The kingdom of the pure in soul, is inside his heart. The sun shining in it is the light of the Holy Spirit, its air is the breeze of the comforting Holy Spirit; and his fellow dwellers are the spiritual attributes of the pure; their life, joy, and rejoicing are Christ, the Light of the Father¹.

The appearance of the firmament like an awesome, stretched out crystal, refers to the nature of crystal, that reflects as a mirror what is before it, inside it. So, the appearance of God, carried above the firmament, is reflected inside the believer; In other words, the soul, having become a heaven and a sanctuary to the Lord, became like crystal that carries His image, and reflects His features in it. This vision reminds us of what St. John saw: *“Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal”* (Rev 4:6). **Bishop Victorianus**² believes that this sea refers to Baptism; whoever wishes to encounter Him who sits on the throne, has to wade into that sea, to have the grace of God penetrate his soul, to be prepared for the kingdom. As to being like crystal; it is fitting for those who are to be baptized, to be strong and steadfast.

As the rays of the Sun of Righteousness who sits on the throne reflects on the sea of crystal, the colors of rainbow appear clear on the Living Creatures. In other words, the talents and the various gifts of

¹ المؤلف: الحب الإلهي، 1967، ص770.

² المؤلف: رؤيا يوحنا اللاهوتي، اصحاح 4.

God, would appear in the life of believers.

5- THE THRONE AND THE ONE SITTING ON IT

“And above the firmament over their heads, was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone. On the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around” (Ez. 1:26, 27).

As the believer’s life turned into a heavenly firmament, on which various colors are reflected through the likeness of crystal; In it will appear the throne of God, and the Word of the incarnate God sitting as a King on the heart. He appears like a man, yet at the same time as bright amber; from His waist upward as fire; and from His waist downward full of brightness. Thus God appears to us as fire that burns up all evil in us; and by the splendor that He pours into our inner depths, our inner insight is opened and is filled with glory. He approaches to reconcile us; to consume in us the works of the old man, and to fill us with the splendor of the new man.

St. Gregory the Theologian saw the mystery of divine incarnation proclaimed through this vision; saying that that chariot carrying God is St. Mary the virgin, who was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, to become glorified and filled with virtues¹.

6- THE RAINBOW

Wherever the divine throne appears, we see a rainbow around it (Rev 4:3); as the glory of God is not only might and greatness, but also love without limits. The rainbow is the sign of love that was presented by God when he made a covenant with Noah after the great flood (Gen 9). God keeps on loving mankind through His covenant with us. This rainbow has many colors, proclaiming God’s various graces and gifts to us. As a bow, it refers to the bow that was used in wars; as though God defends us by His bow; but with no arrows; as He does not like bloodshedding; By Him we conquer sin and trample upon the devil.

¹ *Four Homilies, 2.*

Origen¹ believes that the presence of the four faces together (the lion, eagle, ox, and man), is a reference to the return of the holy Living Creatures to their former domesticated nature. If in the Messianic era, the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the lion shall graze where the calf does (Isaiah 11:6); this perfect harmony will be realized in the ultimate advent of Christ; when all will be one in Him, will enjoy union and peace together in Him; as we will be in heaven itself together with all the heavenly creation.

Finally we would like to mention what **Father Novation**, of the third century, said concerning that vision. He saw in the fiery chariot a symbol of God's care for mankind He who condescends on behalf of man². He believes that the fiery chariot is the universe with all its stars, with their regular movements. He said that God controls the universe using the angels, symbolized by the Living Creatures. The wheels are the movement of seasons and days; the legs are the movement of time; the eyes in the wheels are God's care from which nothing is hidden; the fire refers to the vital power that revives the world, or to the heat, without which the world would stand still; As to the two girdles that control the living creature, these are the natural law³.

SHOW ME YOUR HEAVENS

I long to behold Your heavens!
You revealed Your heavenly chariot to Your prophet Ezekiel;
And You opened a gate in heaven to Your disciple John!
I long to behold Your heavens!
I want to know where I shall settle down, O my soul's beloved!
Amid the bitterness of captivity,
You revealed Your chariot to You prophet;
So he realized that You are the Maker and Controller of history!
Reveal Your mysteries to me; to be sure that I am carried on Your arms!
Ezekiel saw You in the midst of the whirlwind, the cloud, and the fire.
Let Your Holy Spirit blow on my soul;

¹ *In Hom 11:3.*

² *De Trinit. 3.*

³ *Jean Daniélou ; The Origins of Latin Christianity, 1977, p. 242.*

so that I may smell a heavenly breathe.
Lift me up as though on a cloud, to protect me from the serpent.
Let Your Holy Spirit inflame my heart with the fire of Your love!

Your chariot is greatly amazing; a cherubim chariot;
Having faces like those of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle.
Count me as a chariot and a throne, to dwell inside me!
Sanctify everything in me:
The feelings of my heart, as a man of God;
The strength of my soul as a daring lion;
My offerings and gifts as an ox, a burnt offering for You;
My thoughts and meditations, to fly like an eagle in the heavenliness!
Grant me six wings together with the cherubim.
Grant me humility and hope, as two wings to cover my legs, as though
from sin!
Grant me insight and love as two wings;
so as to behold the splendor of Your glory!
Grant me Your proclamations and grace as two wings,
by which to fly up to Your bosom!

Grant me eyes within and without together with the Living Creatures.
Grant me heavenly wisdom to live on the earth as well as in the
heavenliness!

Show me Your heavens, to yearn to depart to You!
Let me behold the light of Your face, to become myself light!

Grant me eyes on every side; for my whole being to become a face;
And never to have a back!
To move in every direction; yet never give You a back but a face!

How amazing are those two wheels in Your fiery chariot!
Moving incessantly by the Spirit!
How amazing are the two Testaments: the Old and the New!
By Your Holy Spirit I enjoy their mysteries,
to move always toward heaven!
Their rims are so high from earth to heaven!
Let Your Word lift me up in the two Testaments,
so as not to stay any longer in the dust!

How beautiful are You who sits on the throne!
How amazing is the rainbow around You!

Show me Yourself... I long to enjoy You!
Grant me a strong faith in Your precious promises and Your eternal
covenant!

CHAPTER 2

A CALL FOR MINISTRY

As the prophet Ezekiel saw the fiery chariot - the likeness of the glory of God (Ez. 1:28), he fell on his face, a sign of his complete inability to encounter God. But God called him for ministry, granting him the possibilities as well as the conditions of work.

As God calls for ministry, He provides us with qualifications to realize it. **St. Augustine** says that God's commands make man capable of carrying out His work. In full confidence, the minister of God says: "*Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*" (Mic 3:8); God never sends someone on his own expense; or to realize the message of God by his own ability; but grants him all the possibilities of success¹.

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|--|--------------|
| 1- Enjoyment of the experience of resurrection | 1. |
| 2- Working by the Spirit of God | 2. |
| 3- A feeling of being a steward | 3-5. |
| 4- Ministering with courage | 6-7. |
| 5- Caring for his personal life | 8. |
| 6- Enjoyment of the experience of the word of God | 9-10. |

1- ENJOYMENT OF THE EXPERIENCE OF RESURRECTION

As the prophet Ezekiel saw the fiery chariot, he helplessly fell on his face, as though he was about to die; that is why God commanded him saying: "*Son of Adam, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you*" (Ez. 2:1). As it is not possible to speak to an almost dead man, he should first stand on his feet, in order to enjoy listening to the words of God. If it is the mission of the ministers of God to bring the souls, dead with sins, to the risen life; it is rather fitting for the ministers themselves to experience the resurrection inside them. This is what happened with Saul of Tarsus, who thought that he was capable on his own, by his human zeal, by his Law upbringing, and by his personal capabilities and talents, to minister to God. Yet, when he encountered the Lord Christ, he fell on his face as dead, and realized that he was nothing. He then heard the divine voice saying: "*Rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared*

¹ See H. A. Ironstone: *Ezekiel*, ch. 2.

to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you” (Acts 26:16). When he rose and enjoyed the new resurrected life, he started to preach to the Gentiles “Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18). That is the mission of the disciples and the apostles: “With great power, they gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (Acts 4:33).

The command to rise and to stand on his feet, refers to the importance of working incessantly; as God does not work through the slothful, but through the persistent strife. By persistent work, we carry a divine feature, according to the words of the Lord Himself: *“My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17).*

The prophet Ezekiel was commanded to rise on his feet, to be ready to realize a holy and an important mission. He had been deprived of the priestly work because of captivity; but God is calling him now for prophetic work, to present the divine will to a rebellious nation; to stand in awe before God, to listen attentively to His voice, to realize His will.

2- WORKING BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The command was given to rise; but how could the fallen creation rise?! We are in need of the Spirit of God Himself, the Life-giver; who grants us the union with Christ Jesus, the risen from the dead; to experience in us the power of His resurrection.

Ezekiel describes his rise as such: *“The Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me” (Ez. 2:2).* He could not have heard the divine voice speaking to him, nor entered with Him into the talk of love, except by the entrance of the Holy Spirit in his life. By that he could comprehend the divine words, experience the divine work, and become capable of preaching by the power of the Spirit.

Ezekiel started his ministry by the opening of heaven before him, to see the awesome divine chariot. He trembling fell on his face; and needed the Spirit of God to raise him and help him to stand on his feet. The Lord Christ, on the other hand, started His ministry by the opening of heaven, to let those present know that He is the Only-Begotten Son, beloved by the Father; and to let them behold the Holy Spirit coming

down on Him as a dove. He opens heaven to grant His believers the adoption to God, to find for them a place in the Father's bosom. While the prophet Ezekiel got terrified because, through the divine chariot, he receives the prophecy of divine chastisement; the Lord Christ rejoiced, because, by His Baptism, he proclaims the forgiveness of sin, and believer's enjoyment of the New Covenant, in the worthiness of His precious blood.

3- A FEELING OF BEING A STEWARD

If the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers, is broadly to bring them to the resurrection of the Lord Christ, for them to have in baptism the new life according to the image of their Creator. The same Spirit works in the ministers of the Church, to descend to where people lie in the death of sin, and to set forth with them to the joyful gospel of resurrecting with Christ, and to the enjoyment of the risen life. This is the work of the minister. It is something beyond any human energy; it is the work of God Himself; the minister is only the steward of God's mysteries. This is what the Lord confirmed; saying: *"Son of Adam, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. For they are impudent and stubborn children, I am sending you to them"* (Ez. 2:3, 4).

God is confirming to him the difficulty of his mission; there is a need for descending to a rebellious, impudent, and stubborn people, taking after their fathers and grandfathers. Who can bring them forth to obedience, instead of rebellion; to gentility, instead of cruelty; to openness of heart instead of its hardness and narrowness? It is the work of God Himself. That is why He confirms more than once: *"I am sending you;"* namely, it is My mission and not yours; to work inside the heart; to create it anew and grant it life.

That is what those working honestly in the vine of the Lord realized. The apostle Paul says: *"Let a man so considers us, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God"* (1 Cor 4:1). He realized that he is just a steward who speaks and works, not in his own name but in that of the One who sent him. **St. John Chrysostom** comments on this, saying: [A steward carries out well the affairs of his employer; he does not refer to himself what are his employer's; but on the contrary he refers what are his to his employer... Do you want an example of honest

stewards? Hear what the apostle Peter says: “*Why do you look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk*” (Acts 3:12). And to Cornelius he said: “*Stand up; I myself am also a man*” (Acts 10:26). The apostle Paul was not less honest; saying: “*I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*” (I Cor 15:10)... When some dishonest people opposed him, he says: “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” (1 Cor 4:7)¹.]

The minister, as a steward, works for his employer, and not for himself; that is why **St. John Chrysostom** was always cautious before love of vainglory and praise; lest he would extort God’s right. In this concern he says: [Surely, the mystery of priesthood will condemn us if we abuse it]; and: [Who takes over himself the mission of preaching, while he harbors such desires (love of being praised), would be chased by pains and afflictions. It is easier for the sea to have no waves, than for such a person to be without trouble or grief².] This saint, apprehensive of himself as the Patriarch of Constantinople, said: [I shed tears when I see myself sitting on a chair higher than those of others; and when I get more respect than they do.]

It is not the work of Christ’s ambassadors to give eloquent human speeches; nor to parade their achievements, and glorify their personal efforts; their work is to proclaim the word of God, and to call for repentance with the spirit of humility and meekness. The word of God is strong and capable; as “*Where the word of a king is, there is power*” (Eccles 8:4). God is the King of kings; “*His word shall not return to Him void*” (Is 55:11).

Feeling of being a steward gives the minister strength, He would never fear work, even if it seems difficult or impossible; he works leaning on the breast of his employer, whatever the consequences are; as he hears the divine voice: “*As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse - for they are a rebellious house - yet they will know that a prophet has been among them*” (Ez. 2:5). That does not imply that God does not know whether they hear or refuse, but he so says, to give them the freedom of choosing either; to have no excuse to claim that He

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص، 17.

² المرجع السابق ص 193، 196.

condemned them of rebellion beforehand. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [He did not utter that out of ignorance, but to keep any of the oppressors from claiming that his prophecy committed them to rebellion¹.]

4- MINISTERING WITH COURAGE

“And you, son of Adam, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are rebellious house” (Ez. 2:6).

The divine mission is not easy; as the minister works as though among briars and thorns that corrupt the plantation of God; and as though dwelling among scorpions, subject to their hidden stings. Yet, he should not fear men, nor be dismayed by their talk, or by their looks; He should recall God’s command to Joshua the son of Nun: *“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid nor dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go”* (Jos 1:9); And His warning to the prophet Jeremiah against fear; saying: *“Rise and speak to them all I command you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them. For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar and bronze walls against the whole land.... They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, ‘says the Lord,’ to deliver you”* (Jer 1:17-19). It is as though He is threatening his minister, if dismayed, not only to stop protecting him, but also to dismay him Himself; as He does not work in the heart that does not lean on Him.

St. John Chrysostom presented us with a splendid example of a father filled with compassion, who loves his flock more than the light of his eyes. If one of his children happen to fall in sin, he would feel as though he personally is in a great danger, or in a dark prison, or condemned to get scourged 10,000 times, or to be thrown into a deep pit; That is why he used to cry out to his children, saying: [I can’t bear it any more! Stretch your hands to help me².] Yet he was straightforward and brave, used to say boldly, frankly, and without fear: [I am ready to bear anything. Whoever persist on his behavior and disregard my warnings, I

¹ In Matt, hom 68 :1.

² راجع للمؤلف : القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1980، ص 170، 171.

shall ban him from entering the Church, as though by the sound of a trumpet; even if he is a prince or an emperor! How can I sit on this chair, if I do not do what is fitting for it?! It is better for me to leave it; as there is nothing worse than a Bishop who does not benefit his people¹.]

God called the rebellious people, ‘briers, thorns, and scorpions;’ not to make His minister despair or despise them, but to be aware of the difficulty of the task and to be well prepared for it; to say with the righteous ‘Job’: “*I (became) a brother of Jackals, and a companion of ostriches*” (Job 30:29). And to remember the words of the apostle Paul: “*That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as light in the world*” (Phil 2:15).

Some may object, saying: Why did God call them as such? **St. Clement of Alexandria** answers: [This is a great proof of His love; as despite His knowledge of the extent of their disgrace, that made Him uproot and drive them out of Jerusalem, yet He exhorts them to repent².]

God speaks frankly with His ministers, proclaiming to them the difficulty of their mission. Although in every generation, they will encounter opponents to the Truth; and they should be prepared to bear pain and persecution; Yet, they should be sure that God would grant them the grace to be capable of overcoming the opposing currents. The minister should be aware that roses do not pave the road of ministry, but it is the narrow way of the cross, that will definitely end in the joy of resurrection. Our God does not deceive us, but He clearly reveals to us the roughness and affliction of the way.

God says: “*You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious*” (Ez. 2:7); as though the minister’s mission is to offer the word of God as it is. They may listen and repent, or refuse to respond to the divine voice. So be it! The minister’s success lies in his honesty in presenting the word of God as it is.

5- CARING FOR HIS PERSONAL LIFE:

Although God chose Ezekiel for prophetic work; and knows

¹ المرجع السابق ص 158.

² Instr. 1 ; 9.

well his heart and his strife; yet He warns him saying: “*Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house*” (Ez. 2:8). He feared for him, lest as he preaches to the people to be obedient, he might fall together with them in rebellion, instead of lifting them up. It is as though God intends to confirm to His minister, that he should not forget his personal salvation, or his spiritual life during his ministry; as many have lost their peace and salvation in the course of their human zeal, and their labor in ministry. That is why the apostle Paul says: “*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become rejected*” 1 Cor 9:27). That is what made **St. John Chrysostom’s** heart, melting for the sake of ministry, become alert, not only for the salvation of his brothers, but also for his own salvation; saying: [My words are beneficial for my own life, more than for that of those who listen to me¹.] He also says: [I am aware of the seriousness and difficulty of my mission; The storms that sweep the soul of a priest, are far more violent than those of the sea².]

6. ENJOYMENT OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE WORD OF GOD

“*Open your mouth and eat what I give you. Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then he spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside; and written on it were lamentations, and mourning³ and woe*” (Ez. 2:8-10).

The subject of his work was the ‘word of God,’ that a minister of God should eat, to fulfill his inner depths, and to become the object of continuous meditation. He should even hide in it; presenting nothing of his own, but what is God’s.

Eating the word implies its entrance into his depths, turning in his life into blood that flows in his veins; as though he intermingles with it, and counts it as his life! He eats it and lives by it to offer it to others; through presenting his own evangelic life, as a message to be read by all people.

¹ In 2 Thess PG 62 :498.

² المؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم ، ص 186.

³ الترجمة السبعينية "تسبحه أو أغنية. ". "hymn, "or " song" according to the Septuagint.

St. John Chrysostom used to offer his congregation an almost daily feast of the Holy Bible, giving special care to the apostolic evangelic word; in one of his homilies he says: [You heard the apostolic voice! It is a heavenly trumpet! It is harp of the Spirit! Yes, Reading in the Scriptures is a meadow! It is a garden that does not only offer flowers, but fruits that feed the soul! We are like those who melt gold they extract from the apostolic mines; but not by casting it in a furnace; but by introducing it in their souls' minds; not through using earthly fire, but that of the Spirit. Let us meticulously collect tiny pieces of it... Jewels are not valued by their size, but by their natural beauty¹.]

He received a scroll of a book, with writing on the inside and on the outside; probably meaning that the word of God is proclaimed on the outside by letters on paper; but there is the need for the work of the Holy Spirit, to reveal in the heart the writings that are on the inside; namely the deep inner concept. He probably also means that that book includes on the outside, the people's sins and transgressions, while on the inside it includes God's chastisements for the sake of their repentance.

The writings, according to the Septuagint version were: "Lamentations, mourning and woe" (Ez. 2:10). The following are some comments by the saintly fathers on this phrase:

❖ The Book as a whole is filled with woe on those who would end in perdition, with mourning for the saved, and with lamentation for those in between (namely those on their way to repentance)².

Origen

❖ It included two sad things and one that will bring joy; as whoever weeps now, will find salvation in the future; as "*The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of the fools is in the house of mirth*" (Eccles 7:4). And as the Lord Himself says: "*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh*" (Luke 6:21)³.

St. Ambrose

❖ In it was written '*Lamentations, mourning, and woe.*' The first of these concerns you, if, as a sinner, you repent your sins. The second concerns the saints, who are called to praise the Lord; as praise is not

¹ *Conc. Statues, hom 1 :1, 2.*

² *Comm. Ioan. 5 :3.*

³ *Conc. Repent : 2 : 6.*

for the mouth of sinners. The third concerns those who are in despair like you, who delivered themselves to abomination, adultery, greed, and lowly lusts; those who assume that death is the end of everything; and that, after death there is nothing else; those who say: “*When the overflowing scourge passes through, it will not come to us*” (Is 28:15). The scroll the prophet eats, represents all the Holy Bibles, that makes the repentant weep, the righteous dignified, and gives woe to the despairing¹.

St. Jerome

I AM YEARNING TO LABOR IN YOUR VINE

When You revealed Your heavens to Ezekiel,
He yearned to minister to you.
Reveal it to me, to make me labor seriously in Your vine.
Your heavens are joy and rejoicing;
Ministering to You is a heavy cross,
But, at the same time, it is joy and rejoicing.
How wonderful is working for You,
You proclaim Yourself to those working by, and for You.

You sent Your prophet to a very stubborn people.
But Your Spirit raised him to raise many.
Grant me the spirit of resurrection, so as not to fear death.
Death has gotten into my brethren and me.
But You are the Resurrection itself.
You sent him to a stubborn people.
And feared lest stubbornness may get into him.
Keep me, lest, in my ministry, I may fall and weaken.
Keep me by Your grace, and keep your people.

What can I offer my brethren?
Here I am, opening my mouth, for You to stretch Your hand with the
scroll.

I will eat it, and enjoy its sweetness, O You, the sweetness of my soul.
This stretched hand is Your incarnation.
You have given me Your Body to eat, O the Word of God.

In Your Word, there is sweetness and bitterness.

¹ *Epis. 147: 3 (See Epis. 122 :1).*

Make it sweet by Your grace; as I acquire Your divine promises.
Grant me to accept Your chastisements, as temporary bitterness,
For the sake of everlasting edification of my soul.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORK OF THE WORD OF GOD

Some believe that the prophet Ezekiel, after opening his mouth and receiving from God the Holy Bible to eat, he kept it in his mouth; That is why God commanded him again to eat and swallow the scroll, to let it enter into his depths, to get filled and fulfilled; he then, would realize his responsibility as a watchman, who knows when to talk to warn and to guide, and when to keep quiet; to work under the leadership of the Spirit of God..

1- The sweetness of the word of God	1-3.
2- The difficulty of the task	4-14.
3- His responsibility as a watchman	15-21.
4- The need for a retreat before starting work	22-23.
5- There is a time to keep silent, and a time to speak	24-27.

1- THE SWEETNESS OF THE WORD OF GOD

God commanded the prophet Ezekiel to eat the scroll (the word of God); the same way He commanded St. John the beloved (Rev 10:9). The prophet Jeremiah says: *“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart”* (Jer 15:16). And the Lord Christ Himself says: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God ”* (Mat 4:4). The word of God is delicious food, that gives life, joy and inner rejoice. We feed on it and carry it in our depths. It is sweet, though it carries bitterness, because of God’s chastisements for the sake of our salvation.

Having received the word of God as an open scroll, the prophet Ezekiel read what is written inside and outside it, to find that it includes lamentations, mourning, and woe. As he opened his mouth to be fed by the hand of God, to fulfill his depths, he found it in his mouth like honey in sweetness.

How amazing is the love of God! He deals with us like a governess or a compassionate mother; stretching his hand to feed us, his beloved infants; We throw ourselves on his chest, like an infant on his mother’s breast; to find his commandment like pure milk flowing from his two breasts (the two Testaments) and as honey. His commandment is fit both for children, and for mature adults.

God's commandment is difficult and heavy on the natural man; even seen by some as a shackle on human freedom. Yet when the hand of God stretches to offer it to us therein, we find it to be like honey in sweetness. What is this stretched hand seen by Ezekiel (2:9), but the Son of God, who is called "the arm of God," that became visible through incarnation. He who presents to us His divine commandment through practical mutual love between God and man, and between man and his brother. He offers Himself as a role Model and a Helper; saying: *"This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you; You are My friends;... No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to You"* (John 15:12-15). By this, God's commandment is no longer a command we are committed to obey, but is the opening of our inner insight by love; to realize the will of our Beloved; to obey Him as His beloved; our will voluntarily going hand in hand with His divine will! By this we can comprehend His words: *"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me;... For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"* (Mat 11:29-30); although He previously said: *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace but a sword;... He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me"* (Mat 10:34, 38). By love, the pain becomes sweet, the cross becomes a glory, and the commandment as sweet as honey.

The word of God also carries warnings against the fallen to repent; something that might get a minister in an awkward situation; and subjects him even to troubles and afflictions, yet it provides him, at the same time, with sweetness and joy; as he realizes the salvation intentions of God. When the apostle Paul wrote harshly to the Corinthians, he made them sad; Yet he explained to them that, he is happy because this sadness is for the sake of repentance, to have them rejoice together with him; saying: *"For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me. And I wrote this very thing to you, lest when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you"* (2 Cor 2:2-4).

2- THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TASK

God did not send him to a foreign nation, of unfamiliar speech, but He sent him to His people, who have the Law of God. Yet, having always been a rebellious nation, they refused to listen to the Law that was received by Moses on the Mount of Sinai; and kept on refusing the word of God on the tongues of prophets. And when the Word Himself came to them, they also rejected Him.

God punishes them in an indirect way; saying to Ezekiel: *“Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you”* (Ez. 3:6). And actually, when the Word came, the Gentiles of foreign origin accepted Him.

Ezekiel’s mission was a very difficult one; *“For all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted”* (Ez. 3:7). That is the work of sin in the life of man. It makes his heart hard as rock, and his forehead strong. It makes him shamelessly refuse to listen to the divine voice, and fiercely reject it. Yet God grants strength to His ministers, saying: *“Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house”* (Ez 3:8, 9). If evil is naturally fierce, yet, It cannot prevail forever. It will eventually be destroyed by good, as light scatters darkness, and as truth destroys vain. The kingdom of God holds forever, while that of the devil would only temporarily hold. Thus, when the minister of God resorts to God as his refuge, the devil will not be able to prevail before him.

Having heard the word of God, Ezekiel heard behind him a great thunderous voice (Ez 3:12). Those are the heavenly possibilities that secretly act in the heart, thundering to devastate evil, that hardens the hearts of sinners. He heard the voice of the wings of the Living Creatures that touched one another; that work together by one spirit, to support us with their prayers for our sake. As to the voice of the wheels, it is the authority of the evangelic word that captivates and attracts the hearts.

Even with all these heavenly divine possibilities, beside the support of the heavenliness, and the activity of the word itself; the ministry, is still filled with suffering and labor. Because of the bitterness of his inner heart, for the sake of the broken souls; the prophet says: *“So*

the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me” (Ez 3:14).

Ezekiel had to proclaim the message among those who were suffering captivity; They could either receive the word of God, as the smell of life for life, or as the smell of death for death. Unfortunately, they did not benefit from being in captivity, nor their hearts softened because of chastisement. They did not listen to the word of God in the midst of their sojourn, but their stubbornness became fiercer against God and His prophets. God revealed to Ezekiel that they would refuse to listen to him, and would even oppose and persecute him. Yet, it is their responsibility, not his. As for him, he is committed to enjoy a divine strength that would make him hard as flint, to face their hardness (v. 8).

The Spirit of God lifted him up, and took him away from before the throne, to where the captives were, to minister to them (v. 12-15); to let him realize that his movements were not according to his own human will, but according to the plan of God. He was carried by the Spirit; went in bitterness, and the hand of the Lord was strong upon him (Ez 3:14). The bitterness of his soul, might have been caused, as he compared between his standing before the divine throne, partaking of the heavenliness’ praises, and his confrontation with the captives, whose peace and joy of heart have been destroyed by Sin. In his bitterness, and having been reluctant to depart from the divine presence, he could have said together with the apostle Peter: *“Lord, it is good for us to be here”* (Mat 17:3). He might be embittered, as he felt the deprivation of the people of what he saw and experienced, standing before the divine throne.

3- HIS RESPONSIBILITY AS A WATCHMAN

Having eaten the word of God, and been fulfilled by it, he still remained among the captives seven days; not knowing what to do. Then the voice of God came to him saying, *“Son of Adam, I have made you a watchman”* (Ez 3:17). Two things are necessary to designate a watchman: To eat the word of God, and to remain seven days among his people. The figure 7 refers to perfection; the consummation of the weekdays. It is as though the watchman is not a hired laborer who works for a wage, and for a certain time then takes rest; but he is truly someone who is loving, spending his whole life among his people and knowing no

rest for himself. The apostle Paul intending to describe Moses, the first leader of the people of God, he said of him: “*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasure of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward*” (Heb 11:24-26). Such are the features of a spiritual watchman; to work among his people and to minister to them, carrying their reproach, not seeking what is his, but what is for their comfort.

Calling him a “watchman,” is a sign of the spiritual war he goes through. In his ministry, he washes the feet of others, and fights the devil and his hosts.

In the old days, cities were almost always built on the top of hills, surrounded by high walls with watch-towers, where watchmen could follow and warn the people of the movements of any enemy who may approach the city. Then the gates of the city would be closed; and the army would get ready for war.

God’s command to Ezekiel was: “*Hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me*” (Ez 3:17). As a watchman, he should have the spirit of discernment, through keeping of the word of God and his fellowship with Him. He should not warn them on his own, but by what he hears from the mouth of God. He should not speak in his own name, but in that of God “*from Me.*” By that, he would be capable of warning strongly without fear, compliment, or prejudice; lest souls might be lost, and he could be held responsible for them.

God clarified to his minister the extent of his responsibility for the perdition of every soul he neglects to warn; something that always terrified the ministers of God along the ages. That is why, when **St. Ambrose** knew of a certain transgression committed by Emperor Theodosius, he hastened to write to warn him, saying: [Can I hold my peace?! Then my conscience would be shackled; I would be deprived of my utterance; and I would be in the worse condition I can imagine!... If the priest does not speak to the sinner, he would die in his sin; and the priest would himself come under the same punishment, because he did not warn him against his sin¹.] Once again he wrote to him, saying: [I

¹ Epistle 51:3.

beg you to listen with patience to what I say. If I am not worthy of your attention, I would also be unworthy to present offerings on your behalf; you who entrusted me with your gifts and your prayers... It is not for the emperor to ban the freedom of speech; and it is not for the priest to refrain from uttering what he thinks right¹.]

St. John Chrysostom presented us with a magnificent example of how a watchman should care, not only for the congregation as a whole, but for every single soul, as though it is the whole congregation; saying: [Each one of you, in my eyes, is worth the whole city².]

He also says: [Let no one tells me that many of you have kept the commandment. this is not good enough for me! I want everyone to do that; and I will not hold my breath until I see that realized. If one among the Corinthians committed adultery, the apostle Paul would moan, as though the whole city had got lost³.]

Feeling his responsibility as a watchman, he says to the priests of the Ephesians Church: *“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God... Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears”* (Acts 20:26, 27, 31). And as **Fr. Caesarius of Arles** says: [Of what blood is the apostle innocent? Naturally it is that of the souls and not of the bodies⁴.] And he also says: [We should fear, lest many souls would be lost, because of a famine for God’s Word, caused by our negligence; for which we would be held responsible on the day of judgment⁵.]

4- THE NEED FOR A RETREAT BEFORE STARTING WORK:

God warned the watchman against hastening to act, and commanded him to *“arise and to go into the plain, and there he will talk with him”* (Ez 3:22). There, God showed Ezekiel once more time His heavenly glory, as He did by the River Chebar. The success of the mission does not depend on the volume of work, as much as on the quality of the minister. He is committed to have himself sanctified

¹ *Ibid* 40:1.

² *De Terrac. motu. p. 650, 714.*

³ *Conc. Statutes, Homily 13:12.*

⁴ *Sermon 1:3.*

⁵ *Ibid 1:15.*

through his retreat with God, to lift his heart up to the divine glories; so as to present to the people, in his own life, “ the strength of heavenly life.”

“Going into the ‘plain’ to behold the glory of God, is necessary for every minister; That is why, after having been called for ministry, the apostle Paul was committed to live three years in the wilderness, in a long retreat with God, to get prepared for the apostolic work. **St. Augustine** speaks of the commitment of ministers to spiritual retreat; yet taking care that retreat would not hinder work; nor work would hinder retreat; saying: [Those who are committed to do good and to care for souls, have to bear for others a testimony to the other kind of life (meditation). That is why they should dedicate themselves to the study and meditation on the truth and the eternal life. It is not right as well, that life of meditation should hinder someone from carrying out his other Church duties¹.]

In our ministry, we need God to be transfigured in our hearts; and to enjoy the divine presence; not for once, but every now and then; in order to enjoy new and continuous visions, that would reveal the glory, the power, and the possibilities of God. We should be sure that He works in and by us; that He is always present inside us; always transfiguring in our depths.

5- THERE IS TIME TO KEEP SILENCE, AND TIME TO SPEAK

The vision happened again, and Ezekiel again fell on his face, to have the Spirit enter him and set him on his feet, and speak with him saying: “*Go shut yourself inside your house... You will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute, and not be a reprover to them, for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God...’*” (Ez 3:24-27). Such was God’s command to him, not to act with human zeal, but to be mute and not to speak until he is allowed to do so; to speak at the time God sees convenient, by God’s words, and in His name. If he, as a watchman, would be judged if he holds his peace before evil, yet he should learn to act according to the words of the wise King Solomon: “*There is time to keep silence, and a time to speak*”

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، 709، 710.

(Eccles 3:7). And as **St. Ambrose** says: [Weigh your talk, and measure your words], and [A wise man takes into consideration what he should say, to whom he talks, the circumstances of place and time... There should also be a measure of when to keep silent and when to speak¹.] And Fr. Gregory (the Great) says: [A Shepherd should be wise in his silence, and useful with his talk².]

FEED ME WITH YOUR COMMANDMENT O YOU THE DESIRE OF MY HEART

Feed me with your commandment, O You, the desire of my heart!
Stretch Your hand and offer me Your commandment, a heavenly Bread.
I am a child, even a suckling; I will not accept food from someone else!
You have compassion on me, more than my own parents, O Savior of my soul!

Your commandment is difficult, O Savior of my soul.
Your cross is heavy; and Your way is narrow and rough.
Yet, from Your hands, Your commandment would be bread and honey.
Your cross would be glory; and Your way a new heaven!

You sent Your prophet carrying Your word to Your rebellious people.
Grant me to carry Your commandment to every soul, however rebellious it may be!

When Your word was delivered, there was great thunder in the sky.
Let the sky thunder, and let every hardness in my heart and in theirs tremble.

Let their shaky natural earthly nature be taken away.
And let them enjoy an eternal heavenly life.

As your prophet presented Your word to the rebellious people, his soul was embittered.

Was his soul embittered, because he wished to stay on beholding Your chariot?!

Or was his soul embittered, having come to experience the rebellion of mankind.

Grant me, amid the bitterness of my soul, to behold your heavens.
Grant me amid my grief, to experience the repentance of many.

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 694.

² للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 694.

Let my heart rejoice by Your divine work in me and in them, O divine Word.

Your prophet remained seven days among the captives.

Grant me to spend all the days of my sojourn working in Your vine.

I am not counting the days like a laborer.

But, as a son, I yearn to work in my father's vine.

Teach me, O divine Word.

When shall I get alone with You, to know Your mysteries?!

When shall I work in Your vine, to minister to Your people?!

Grant me in my retreat, not to forget Your people;

And in my ministry, not to stop meditating on Your mysteries.

Guide me, O True Word.

I do not know when to keep silent, and when to speak.

How should I keep silent; and how should I speak?!

Here I am in Your hands. Be My Guide working in me.

THE SECOND SECTION

WARNINGS BEFORE THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

EZEKIEL 4 - 12

CHAPTER 4

THE PORTRAYED CLAY TABLET AND HIS LYING

God started to command the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy and to warn the people, through symbols and through the use of what we call 'Clarification tools,' like those followed in the kindergarten; because of the limited ability of human language to express; or in an attempt to draw their attention by a series of ocular lessons.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1- The portrayed clay tablet | 1-3. |
| 2- Lying on one side | 4-8. |
| 3- Eating food by weight and with anxiety | 9-17. |

1- THE PORTRAYED CLAY TABLET

God commanded him to portray on a clay tablet, a city under siege; to build a siege wall, heap up a mound, set camps, and place battering rams all around it; as a proclamation that Jerusalem is going to fall under siege. God allowed that divine chastisement against Jerusalem, because, for long years, the holy Temple has been defiled through setting heathen idols inside the holy places.

As Zion felt that God, her Master forsook and forgot her; God confirmed to her, saying: "*I have inscribed you on the palms of My hand*" (Is 49:16). I have inscribed you in My Son Jesus Christ; as you are His holy body; for which He is the Head! I see you in Him, sanctified and justified! Lifted up by Him, and in Him to My bosom; to enjoy the fellowship of My glories. But here, as Zion persists on sinning, being bound to worldly things; and refrains from exalting above the earthliness; God commands Ezekiel to portray her on a clay tablet, instead of being inscribed on the divine palm. He often uttered the phrase: "*I will repay your ways*" (Ez 7:4). As she coveted the earth; He made her inscribed on mud; by that He is granting her the request of her heart! The names of the tribes of Israel, were once inscribed on the precious stones that used to adorn the breastplate of the High Priest, to enter with it into the Holy of Holies, the shadow of the heavenliness; Now the city of Jerusalem is inscribed on a lowly clay tablet, the mud that she wished to be overloaded with!

In the book of the ‘Song of Songs,’ God lovingly compares His children to horses, working together with one spirit, in His divine chariot, for salvation (Song 1:9); “*as beautiful as Tirzah; lovely as Jerusalem; awesome as an army with banners*” (Song 6:4).

But as they persist on rejecting Him, and attaching themselves to abominations, He sets of the nations, mounds and battering rams against them, to destroy their strength; and orders an iron wall to be set all around the city (Ez 4:3); not to protect it; but to keep those inside it from escaping from the chastisements that would befall it.

It is amazing, that God, amid all those bitter moments, commands His prophet, more than once, to set his face toward Jerusalem, and to uncover his arm, while prophesying against it (Ez 4:7). Setting his face toward Jerusalem, and confirming this twice, is a sign of God’s care for His people, both the Jews and of the Gentiles; The Church with all its races, is the object of His care, even during the moments of bitter chastisement. He allows for His children to pass through bitter afflictions yet, together with salvation. That is why **St. John Chrysostom** calls suffering, ‘the school of philosophy¹,’ and says: [When we err, God sets our enemies to chasten us; thus it is fitting for us, not to fight them, but to examine ourselves. We should accept suffering the same way we accept bitter medication from a physician for our own benefit, and the way we accept chastisement from our fathers to gain glory. Ben Sirach says: “My son; If you set yourself to minister to your God, be prepared to confront temptations and be patient.”²]

The uncovered arm, refers to the incarnation; as the Church Fathers believe that “the Arm of God” refers to the “Son;” and the “Finger of God” refers to the “Holy Spirit.” It is as though, Jerusalem would remain under siege, seized by sin and under its dominion, until the ‘Arm of God’ is uncovered. According to the words of St. John: “*Life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us*” (1 John 1:2). Who was unseen, became revealed through incarnation; “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of*

¹ In Acts, PG 60: 378.

² للمؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1981، ص 322.

grace and truth” (John 1:14). Our heart (the inner Jerusalem) was besieged, our temple was defiled, and we became as though dead; until the Father uncovered His Arm; namely, sent His Only-Begotten Son, to set us free, and to bring us back to salvation. That was what the prophet Isaiah saw by the spirit of prophecy; as he brought the good news to Jerusalem, captivated by sin; that was dead and buried under earth, and utterly destroyed; saying: “Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city!... Shake yourself from the dust, arise, and sit down Jerusalem. Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion!... How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation; who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’... Break forth into joy, sing together. You waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has made bare His holy arm, in the eyes of all nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52).

It is obvious that the source of the awakening of Zion, of putting on her strength, of shaking herself from the dust, of loosening herself from the bonds of bondage, and of her future enjoyment of peace, is the uncovering of God’s Arm before the eyes of all nations; namely, the incarnation of the Lord to gather together in His body, congregations to enjoy salvation.

Uncovering the arm also refers to preparation to strike; which I believe does not mean striking His people, but striking the sin that destroyed them. As the Lord Christ have come, not to judge man but to save him... He judged the sin, in which we fell in His body!

God’s heart toward His people did not change. Yet His holiness requires devastating sin, and punishing the sinners, who persist on their wickedness, with the hope that they may return to Him in repentance.

2- LYING ON ONE SIDE

Having proclaimed the siege against Jerusalem, and its captivation, together with hinting about His care for her, and uncovering His holy arm to save her; God started to clarify the activity of sin in the life of man. It would completely destroy him; would cast him into a state of continuous sleep; with no vitality nor activity; man lies on one side, as though paralyzed.

He commanded his prophet to lie on his left side for 390 days (190 days according to the Septuagint version); then to lie on his right side for 40 days. By the first sleep He refers to the iniquity of the house of Israel; and by the second, to that of the house of Judah. The first action refers to the fall of man under the left strike; namely, the obvious sins as adultery, murder, stealing, lying etc. While the right strike is the hidden sins, to which the believers, and those ministering to the Lord, are subjected; like self-righteousness, love of dignity and compliments; things that, although do not look like sins before people, yet they corrupt the life of believers and ministers. Lying on the left side lasts a longer time than lying on the right side; for, although the evil of the house of Judah, came later than that of the northern kingdom of Israel; yet in a shorter time, their evil was consummated. Thus, by the right strikes, believers fell with serious swiftness, and their wickedness is consummated in a shorter time; something that made **St. John Chrysostom** proclaim: [I wonder how a Bishop can ever get salvation!] The fathers of the wilderness used to warn their monk children against the right strikes, more than the left ones; as the later are obvious, and easier to repent; while the former, mostly hidden, infiltrate into the heart, and destroy its repentance.

Why did the left side refer to Israel, and the right to Judah? This is because when man looks toward sunrise, the north will be on his left side, and the south on his right side. Thus the left side represents the northern kingdom of Israel, and the right side represents the southern kingdom of Judah.

Concerning the figures, I do not intend to enter into much detail; as there are several interpretations for them; I shall only mention the following points:

a- Some believe that by adding the two figures together (390 + 40), the total will be 430 days; a symbol of the years of bondage, spent by the nation of Israel in Egypt. It is as though these figures are symbols of the action of sin in the life of believers; bringing them into bitter bondage.

b- Some believe that the figure 390 refers to years that Israel lived, between the falling away of Jeroboam and the devastation of Jerusalem; while the figure 40 refers to the years during which Judah lived in lowliness, before captivity.

c- Some interpret the figure 390 in the following way: Jerusalem remained under siege for 18 months (Jer 52:4-6); If we subtract from it 5 months, during which those besieged departed, when the army of Pharaoh approached the city (Jer 37:5-8), the rest would be 13 months, namely 390 days.

d- The two figures: 390 and 40, refer to sin that covered all men and all worldly life; destroying all humanity with paralysis and destroyed everyone all the days of his life. The figure 390 is the product of multiplying 39 by 10; as the number of the tribes of Israel is 10, and the wage of sin is 39 scourges; as though all tribes were worthy of scourging. The figure 40, on the other hand, refers to the whole worldly life; that is why the Lord Christ fasted 40 days; and so did Moses and Elijah, as a sign of how we should disregard the pleasures of life all the days of our sojourn. The first figure means that sin covers the life of all people; and the second means that it covers our whole life.

Some believe that lying for 390 days on his left side, and for 40 days on his right side, contradicts what is mentioned in (Ez 8:1), where we see the prophet sitting among the elite of his people during that same period; beside the fact that it is almost impossible to literally carry out that command on the part of man.

As an answer to that we say that, it has been the custom in the old days for men to recline while sitting on the floor on a cushion put under the right or left arm, as preferred¹.

That text under consideration, does not imply that the prophet should not move while abiding to God's command; but commit him to keep on reclining on his left side all along the 390 days, and on his right side all along the 40 days; whenever he intends to sit. It also commits him to uncover his whole arm, on which he reclines (v. 7). This command does not keep the prophet from practicing all the movements and various tasks he likes during that period. We do not see any difficulty on the part of the prophet or any other, to carry out that command. We do not find as well, any contradiction with the text that came in Ez 8:1, concerning the prophet's sitting among the elite of his people. The first text does not keep the prophet from sitting with others; and at the same time, it confirms that he was sitting at home; and no

¹ الدكتور وهيب جورجى: مقدمات العهد القديم، 1985، ص 276.

doubt abiding to the position told to him by the divine command; so there is no contradiction between the two texts.

3- EATING FOOD BY WEIGHT AND WITH ANXIETY

Eating food by weight and with anxiety, and drinking water by measure and with dread, is a sign of the famine that was to befall the people for chastisement. It symbolizes the work of sin in the life of man; bringing on his soul a condition of hunger with anxiety, and thirst with dread, altogether with the condition of paralysis that befell it.

He allotted him 20 shekels of bread a day, and 1/6 of a hen (about 1/2 pint or 1/16 of a gallon) of water. That bread is of the worst kind, that is given to the horses and pigs: a mixture of wheat, barley, beans, lentils and mini grains; to eat it while reclining on one side. He commanded him as well to bake it on human waste, instead of wood, as a sign of the extent of defilement and uncleanness that the people reached (Deut 23); but responding to the prophet's supplication to relieve him of this last condition, God allowed him to bake it on cow's dung. This custom is still followed in the country, where cow's dung is used as fuel instead of wood. Anyhow this behavior symbolizes how much people suffered hardship.

THROUGH YOUR LOVE YOU INSCRIBED ME ON YOUR PALMS

You counted me as Your beloved Jerusalem, and the holy Zion.
But with my sins and the abominations of my heart,
I became inscribed on a clay tablet.
I became despised; sunk in mud.
By my negligence, the enemy surrounded me, and destroyed my walls.
You, Who wishes to make Your fiery Spirit a wall for my life!

O Father, You have stretched Your divine arm;
Having sent to me Your Son incarnated,
To cleanse me of dust, to grant me Your fiery Spirit,
And to carry me up to Your bosom.

My sin took away my vitality; I became as though paralyzed;
Sometimes reclining on my left side, struck by evil;
And sometimes reclining on my right side struck by self-righteousness.

My sin deprived me of fulfillment;

Turning my inner Paradise into utter poverty.
Who will rescue me from this famine,
But You, O the fulfillment of my soul?!

CHAPTER 5

CUTTING THE PROPHET'S HAIR

God completes His proclamations - through symbols - about chastening Jerusalem and putting it under siege. He commanded Ezekiel to cut the hair of his head and to shave that of his beard, by means of a sharp sword; and explained to him the mystery and signs of his chastisement to Judah. This is considered as the fourth of the 'clarification tools.'

1- Cutting the prophet's hair	1-4.
2- The reason behind this judgment	5-7.
3- A public judgment	8 .
4- A unique judgment	9-12.
5- A divine judgment	13-15.
6- Successive Stages of judgment	16-17.

1- CUTTING THE PROPHET'S HAIR

“And you, son of Adam, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take balances to weigh and divide the hair. You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind” (Ez 5:1, 2).

God commanded the prophet Moses to speak to the priests, the children of Aaron, saying: *“They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy to their God, and not profane the name of their God, for they offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy” (Levi 21:5, 6).* The divine command was clear and straightforward, that no razor shall touch the head or beard of a priest because he is holy to his God. That is because letting a woman's hair is for her adornment; while letting a priest's hair is a sign that he is not preoccupied with worldly things; dedicating every breath of his life to his priestly ministry. Thus the command to the prophet Ezekiel is a proclamation of the profanity of the priests of that time, and God's rejection of their sacrifices, offerings, and prayers.

When God intended to save the people in the old times, the angel of God appeared to the barren wife of 'Manoah,' and said: "*You shall conceive and bear a son; and no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*" (Judges 13:5). He (Samson), who when his hair was cut, the strength of God left him and became weak (Judges 16:17); and the Lord Himself departed from him (Judges 16:20). He lost his eyes, was bound with bronze fetters, became a grinder in the prison (judges 16:21), and was mocked at by the pagans. But now, It is God Himself Who commands His prophet (a priest) to cut his hair and to shave his beard, as a sign of His departure from the priests of His people, their loss of spiritual insight, their entry into captivity, and their becoming the mocking stock and laugh of the nations.

Cutting the whole hair refers to God's **rejection of entering into any relationship with the people through the priests or the prophets.** He would not accept an offering nor listens to a prayer, to chasten them for their wickedness. It also refers to His rejection of His people for their persistence committing sin. If God is the Head, our life is our abidance in Him. Cutting the hair is the end of the people's abidance in the source of their life. Concerning this **St. Jerome** says: [The prophet Isaiah speaks of a sharp razor that shaves the hair of the head and legs of sinners (Is 7:20). He shaves his head, as a symbol of Jerusalem that became an adulteress; that everything in it became lifeless and with no feelings¹.]

Shaving the whole hair **referring to great grief**, especially in cases of death, was in the eye of God a kind of profanity. That is why He warned His people, saying: "*You are the children of the Lord your God. You shall not cut yourselves, nor shave the front of your head for the dead. For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself*" (Deut 14:1, 2). But now, as Jerusalem became as though dead; and as His people were rejected, He commanded them, as represented by Ezekiel, to profane themselves by shaving the hair of their head.

Shaving the hair is also **a sign of reproach, humiliation, and**

¹ Epistle 70:2.

bondage; Man becomes with no dignity, with no authority even to cut or to let his own hair. That is why slaves used to have their hair completely cut; as well as kings when captivated. So sin does to man, let him lose all authority, and bring him down from a state of royalty and power, to the shame of servitude and fall into captivity and humiliation. David's servants were ashamed to have audience with their king, when Hanun the king of the Ammonites, doubting them, ordered their beards to be shaven. They stayed in Jericho until their beards grew before returning.

Man, likewise, can not encounter with the Lord His heavenly King, while still in the disgrace and reproach of sin; but has to wait until he proclaims his repentance, gets forgiveness, and regains his dignity, to be worthy of the possibility of encountering God, and His heavenly and earthly hosts.

Shaving the hair with a sharp knife, refers to a bloody war; as God allowed the hard-hearted Chaldeans to invade Judah, according to His divine will, for Judah rebelled against God: One-third of its people to perish during the siege of Jerusalem, one-third to be mercilessly slain by the swords of the men of Nebuchadnezzar, and the last third to be scattered on the face of the earth among different nations.

Weighing the hair is a sign, that what would befall the people, of hunger, thirst, death by the sword, and getting dispersed among nations, is not haphazard or a matter of chance; but according to a divine plan, and to the just, honest, and accurate divine balances.

The Lord weighs the hearts" (Proverb 21:2), and *"the spirits"* (Prov 16:2); He who has the ways of man before His eyes, *"And He ponders all his paths"* (Prov 5:21); who *"establish a weight for the wind, and mete out the waters by measure"* (Job 28:25); who *"calculated the dust of the earth in a measure, weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance"* (Is 40 12); whose balances are just and true, and does not stand deceit or favoritism. That is God's nature that He likes to pour into the life of His children. That is why he repeats His commandments: *"You shall not have in your bag different weights, a heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house different measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure"* (Deut 25:13-15); *"Diverse weights are an abomination to the Lord, and a false balance is not good"* (Prov 20:23; 11:1); When God weighs our life, unfortunately He finds it *"lighter than vapor"* (Prov

62:9); or as the prophet Daniel said to king Belshazzar: “*You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting*” (Dan 5:27). And now, what would God do to us, when He finds us like this? He will bear the mystery of our wanting, will carry our iniquity on Himself, and when he comes to the balance, He will be priced as a slave - He, the Judge of all creation! In bitterness He says: “*They weighed out for My wages thirty pieces of silver*” (Zech 11:12). The Lord is evaluated as a slave, while the slave, in his vain self-righteousness says: “*Let me be weighed in a just balance, that God may know my integrity*” (Job 31:6). The perfect One is weighed while bearing our wanting, to become under reproach; and man, in the pride of his heart, wants to be justified in balances before God.

Ezekiel’s hair was weighed as a symbol of the people fallen under the weight of sin, to be found worthy of being hungry, thirsty, scattered, and getting under the sword. These are the fruits of abominations and wickedness.

If the people were found wanting in the balance, yet God would never disregard the very little remnants of them; those who, because of their faithfulness to Him, and complete obedience to His words, He keeps under the tail of His robe - under His care. These remnants probably refer to those, who were left back in Jerusalem under the leadership of ‘Gedaliah;’ or probably refer to the remnants that would stay faithful to God in the days of the false prophet or the antichrist. It is the congregation of God, hidden, kept, and concealed in Him, whom He knows by name, and surrounds them lest any of them would be lost, or snatched by the devil. Yet unfortunately, a few of this little remnant, the Lord commanded to be burned; because, after entering under His care, they rejected Him. Those, about whom the apostle said: “*Having begun in the Spirit, are now being made perfect by the flesh*” (Gal 3:3). That is why the Lord commands us to endure to the end (Mat 24:13); warns us against the last days, when even the elect might be deceived (Mat 24:24).

2- THE REASON BEHIND THIS JUDGMENT

God as a Father, chastening His children, He reveals to them the reason behind His judgment. He is not a dictatorial or a master who takes His revenge; but, even in the firmness of His chastisement, He longs for our return and repentance. That is why He reveals to us our

weaknesses to forsake them.

Two things grieve God's heart: the broken commandment and the defiled temple. Concerning the broken commandment He says: *"They have refused My Judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes"* (Ez 5:6). It is amazing that when the believer falls in rebellion, he becomes more evil than the unbeliever; the Lord says: *"They rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations"* (Ez 5:6). As to defiling the temple, He says: *"Because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations; therefore I will also diminish you. My eyes will not spare, nor will I have any pity"* (Ez 5:11).

Keeping the commandment, and the worship (the temple), are two integrated things in the believer's life. Obeying the commandment grants us dare to stand in God's presence; and standing before Him for worship will support our life in the obedience of the commandment. Whoever thinks that he is keeping the commandment away from the spirit of worship, is deceiving himself. Likewise, whoever thinks that he is pleasing God by his worship, without walking in the obedience of the commandment.

3- A PUBLIC JUDGMENT

When God sent the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Judah to rebuke them for their sins, He said to him: *"Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem"* (Jer 2:2); as though He intended to whisper in their ears, to let them repent with no one knowing what they had committed. But when they did not listen, He commanded him to stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim God's rebuking words (Jer 7:1). And when they persisted in their iniquity, God had to proclaim His chastisement for His people publicly before all nations; They transgressed publicly and shamelessly, and He tried to mend their ways without hurting their feelings, but, because of their growing haughtiness, He said: *"I am against you, and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of nations"* (Ez 5:8). *"Moreover I will make you a waste and a reproach among the nations that are all around you, in the sight of all who pass by; so it shall be a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, and an astonishment to the nations that are all around you"* (Ez 5:14, 15).

God, the holy, does not accept or truce sin, even when His own people in His own holy city commit it.

God, the Philanthropist, covers our transgressions and weaknesses, once and many times; but when He finds that our cure is in putting us to disgrace, He proclaims His chastising on us. This is what the Church also does with her children and ministers. She starts with love, but when there is need for public chastisement, she will do that for the sake of the salvation of the congregation. In the apostolic time, the apostle Paul publicly condemned someone who fell into sin with his father's wife, saying: *"It is actually reported, that there is sexual immortality among you, and such sexual immortality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father's wife!... For I indeed, as absent in body but present in Spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, concerning him who has so done this deed. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus... Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened"* (1 Cor 5:1-7).

4- A UNIQUE JUDGMENT

They raced to do evil and surpassed the nations; that is why God also chastens them with unique judgments: *"I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations. Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds"* (Ez. 5:9-10).

That was the bitter most punishment to befall the believers: that one would eat the other; and even a father would eat his son, and a son would eat his father! As when God's grace forsakes them, they would be corrupted inside; and amid dissension and schisms, every member would eat another, despite being relatives in body or spirit. And finally, there would be nothing left of them but ashes that God will scatter to all the winds.

I say, that the fruit of sin is that the congregation would eat one another, instead of supporting one another; and even dissension would happen within man himself: he would rise against himself, lose his peace, balance, and vitality; to turn, because of sin, into valueless ashes, to be scattered by the wind in every direction.

5- A DIVINE JUDGMENT

God, to confirm to Judah that that public and unique judgment is not coming from the prophet who speaks to them, but from God Himself; He says: *“I the Lord, have spoken”* (Ez 5:15).

If the Chaldeans are fighting and captivating the people; yet, they are actually tools in God’s hand, who zealously uses the nations to chasten them; That is why He confirms: *“Indeed I, even I, am against you”* (Ez 5:9); and repeats the phrase, *“I the Lord have spoken,”* and the like, about 14 times in this book.

That is why, when ‘Absalom’ rebelled against his father David, and the later escaped before him, ‘Shimei the son of Gera’ came to curse him by throwing stones at him and at all the servants, the people, and all the mighty men around him. When ‘Abishai the son of Zeruiah’ said to the king: *“Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head”* (2 Sam 16:9); David wisely and humbly answered him, saying: *“Let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, ‘Curse David.’ Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?...’ It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day”* (2 Sam 16:10-12). **St. John Chrysostom** believes that, when the others plot against us, there is a chance for repentance; saying: [If we err, God will set our enemies against us to chasten us. That is why it is fitting for us not to fight them, but to hold ourselves accountable, and to accept the sufferings, the same way we accept the bitter medication from a physician, for our own sake; and as we accept chastisement from our fathers, to become glorified¹.]

6- SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF JUDGMENT

God, in His long suffering and love, began by talking in secret with His people; then by talking in public; and finally He had to resort to public chastisement. And here also, He chastens in stages, in hope that they may eventually repent. Then He would lift suffering from them. He allows them to go hungry; then increase it until they get in need for bread. Persisting on their iniquity, He brings against them the wild animals to devour their children; then allows for plagues and blood shed... He does not seek revenge, but repentance in all ways.

¹ للمؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1981، ص 322.

**LET ME ABIDE IN YOU, WHO CHASTENS
COMPASSIONATELY**

Let me abide in You, who chastens compassionately!
You allowed it for Your prophet Ezekiel to shave all the hair of his head.
To proclaim his great grief for the corruption of his people - as dead.
And to threaten Your people,
That You would likewise, remove them away from You,
To reject their priesthood that was defiled;
To confirm them in that they are living as shaven-head captive slaves.

Chasten me O Lord; but do not deliver me to someone else!
You who chastens compassionately!

You have chastened me in secret;
And I did not forsake my abominations.
And here you are exposing me among my people.
And even among the nations...
Let it be; but do not deprive me of Your salvation!
Because You are who chastens compassionately!

CHAPTER 6

A WARNING TO FORSAKE IDOLATRY

Having clarified His plan for chastisement, and revealed its goal, He confirmed that, although He set His people as steadfast holy mountains, yet these were defiled by worship of idols, and practice of corruption. That is why He proclaimed that He would shake these mountains, and turn them into communal graves. At the same location where corruption took place, man will be chastened, to taste the fruit of his sins. Yet in all that, God does not forget His holy righteous, even if they are few.

- 1- A prophesy against the mountains of Israel 1-7.**
- 2- Acceptance of the repentant remnant 8-10.**
- 3- The consequences of evil 11-14.**

1- A PROPHECY AGAINST THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL

The Jews took after the pagans their worship of idols on the tops of mountains, hills, rivers, and valleys. That is why God commanded Ezekiel to set his face toward the mountains of Israel, that were defiled by pagan worship, and to prophesy against them. As a judge, He looks at the accused, and judges him face to face, to shake his foundations and abolish them.

Mountains in the Holy Bible have a symbolic concept: The “earth,” in the Holy Bible, mostly refers to the “soul” that descends to earthly thought, to get captivated by the earthly flesh with its lusts, and to get bound by material things. Whereas the “mountains,” in the Holy Bible, mostly refer to the souls, exalted over the earthliness, to dwell together with the Lord in the high places; a holy heavenly Church. That is why God often refers the mountain to Himself; and calls it “*His holy hill*” (Ps 2:6; 99:9; Is 65:11, 25; Joel 2:1); and the Holy Bible call it “*Holy mountain Jerusalem*” (Is 66:20) and “*Holy mountain Zion*” (Dan 3:17, 18).

The two angels instructed ‘Lot’ to escape to the mountain lest he be destroyed (Gen 19:17); as though they were asking him to raise himself up above the transients, lest their whirlpool would overtake him.

And the Psalmist yearned to dwell in God's holy hill (Ps 15:1); namely to have his heart lifted up; there to encounter with God, who dwells in the highs, who will listen to his prayers.

The soul that becomes a holy mountain, will be like the Mountain of 'Horeb;' to which the Lord will approach, not to give it His Law inscribed on stones like He did with Moses, but, by the Holy Spirit, He will inscribe His commandment in its heart. The Lord will sit in it, as He did on the mountain to give His sermon to the multitude "*as One having authority*" (Mat 5). It will become like the mountain of temptation, on which God Himself comes, to lead the spiritual battle against Satan to destroy his authority; so that the soul would have the capability of conquest, and the angels would come to minister to it. It would become like the mountain of Tabor, where the soul would enjoy the fellowship with men of the Old Testament (Moses and Elijah), and those of the New Testament (Peter, James, and John), in the presence of the Lord Christ Himself, who shades it with His shiny cloud, and proclaims His splendor inside it. It would become like the Mount of Olives, where the Lord sat to mourn for His fallen children who have killed the prophets and stoned His apostles; to turn it into a center of work and spiritual ministry. Or would rather become like the Mount of Calvary, to enjoy the cross of the Lord Christ, set inside it, to share with its Groom His passion and crucifixion, to enjoy the power of His resurrection. In short, these mountains mentioned in the Holy Bible, have memories that motivate the soul to enjoy union with God in Jesus Christ, some way or another.

St. Jerome believes that these holy mountains are the prophets and the apostles; saying: [The mountains are interpreted in two ways: In the Old Testament, they are the prophets, and in the New Testament they are the apostles. About these mountains, the Holy Bible says: "*I will lift up my eyes to the hills - from whence comes my help*" (Ps 120:1). On these mountains the city of God is set; as "*A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden*" (Mat 5:14). On us, as well, who were in the darkness and the shadows of death, the Lord shone from His eternal mountains; namely, through His prophets and apostles¹.]

And as the Lord sets His children as holy mountains where He

¹ In Ps. Homily 9 (On Ps. 76:4).

dwells; the devil will likewise set his followers as defiled and offensive mountains. If the holy mountain means the lifting up of the soul to the heavenliness by the Holy Spirit; the evil mountain, on the other hand, means the soul's pride and its rebellion against God's commandment. So, the soul, instead of being a mountain to which the Lord sets forth to pray (Mark 6:46); that "*which God desires to dwell in, forever*" (Ps 68:16); it will become a place where swines feed (Luke 8:32). And the soul, instead of being that mountain to which the Church would ascend together with her Groom, like on the Mount of Tabor, it would become a cause of wandering without aim (Heb 11:38). That is why the Lord proclaims His wrath on the evil mountains, to shake down their foundations; or as the Psalmist says: "*to be carried into the midst of the sea*" (Ps 46:2); "*O mountains that you skipped like rams?*" (Ps 114:2). The Lord threatens those mountains, saying: "*Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys all the earth, says the Lord, and I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you down from the rocks, and make you a burnt mountain. They shall not take from you a stone for a corner nor a stone for a foundation, but you shall be desolate forever, says the Lord*" (Jer 51:25, 26); And says: "*Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage, for the jackals of the wilderness*" (Mal 1:3); "*Raise a banner on a bare hilltop, Shout to them*" (Is 13:2).

God threatened the people diverted to idolatry, on the tongues of the prophets, to bring on them evil, everywhere it was practiced: on a mountain, a hill, a valley, or a river (forests *LXX*). The sword is to extend to evil-doers, to kill them; to abolish their deeds; to turn their cities into desolate ruins; to destroy their high places and destroy their tabernacles; to scatter their bones around their altars, to defile them (2 Kings 23:16). Such would be the destruction of the worshippers together with the object and even the place of their worship.

That is the prophecy that was proclaimed against the mountains of Israel; which implied a bitter warning, as a motivation to repentance. It is actually a prophecy, applicable to every generation, proclaimed against the haughty soul. That God would devastate its high places; namely, would destroy the pride and haughtiness of its heart. He would ruin its altars; namely, its emotions it has abused. He would destroy its tabernacles; namely, exposes it in midday, and shades it no more (by tabernacles, he probably meant the idols of the sun-worship). He would cast its dead before its idols; namely, humiliates it before those with

whom it commits sin. He would scatter their bones around its altar; namely, proclaims its death, spiritually, psychologically, and physically, and the defilement of its life, to let everyone despise it; would turn its dwelling place desolate; namely, leaves its heart unfulfilled; and would abolish its deeds, a sign of taking away every vitality and every energy to work. These chastisements are actually the natural fruit of sin in man's life; it would kill him and destroy his inner energies, and every capability in him.

Here we notice that the Promised Land, that flows with milk and honey; and that testifies to God's pleasure with His believers, would turn into a communal burial place. Instead of fruition, it would turn into a place of death.

From another aspect, God threatens to have them killed beside the altar of Satan, to prove to them their inability to help... He probably intended to show them His justice; that having defiled His temple with the idols, He would allow the idols to be defiled, by killing them in the pagan temples, turning them into tombs full of corruption.

2- ACCEPTANCE OF THE REPENTING REMNANT

Every time God threatens the congregation or the whole people, He is keen to confirm His care for the repenting remnant that returns to Him, even if they are few in number; those who are spared the punishment, not on account of their acceptance of the chastisement (the captivity), but because they repented their sins. *"Because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils, which they committed in all their abominations"* (Ez 6:9). They have sinned like their brothers, and have fallen into adultery, idol worship, and all the other abominations; Yet they wisely received God's chastisement, repented and loathed themselves because of what they have committed. So God will return to save them; *"And they shall know that I am the Lord"* (Ez 6:10); namely, He will grant them His divine knowledge.

Indeed, there is no way for our salvation, except through repentance that would abolish all our abominations in the worthiness of the precious blood by the Holy Spirit. That is why **St. Mark the hermit** says that God will not judge us because we sinned, but will judge us because we did not repent.

3- CONSEQUENCES OF EVIL

God commanded His prophet to clap with his hands (*LXX*) and stamp his feet, like an embittered helpless child; moaning for all their abominations; especially because the fruit of evil has started to befall them; falling by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. It is as though, because of God's displeasure,, men came against them, the earth and the whole nature proclaimed their wrath. The punishment would be more severe in the places of idol worship: on every high hill, on every mountaintops, under every green tree, and particularly, under every thick oak, wherever they offered sweet incense to all their idols (Ez 6:13); the smell of death became theirs.

He proclaimed that He will make the land desolate, from the wilderness toward 'Diblah' (means 'circle') - thought by some to be at the location of the modern 'Dibl,' north of Galilee; although the prevailing view is that it is 'Riblah,' a city in the land of 'Hamath' (2 Kings 23:33; 25:20, 21); By saying 'from the wilderness to Diblah,' he means from the far south to the far north. He probably intended to proclaim the bitterness of what would befall them in the person of their king; As when King Zedekiah was arrested after his escape from Jerusalem, he was brought to Nebuchadnezzar who was in 'Riblah,' who put out his eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters, and took him over to Babylon. (2 Kings 25:6; Jer 39:5-7; 52:9-11).

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

How amazing are Your works, O Lord!
You made me - the dust and sand - a holy mountain for You!
Count me as the Mount of Horeb,
On which to proclaim Your Law,
As the Mount of Tabor,
On which You transfigure with Your splendor.
And as the Mount of Calvary to offer on it the sacrifice of Your love.
On the mountains, Israel set their idols like other nations.
They defiled the high places with their abominations.
With love You chasten by bringing a sword and by abolishing the high
places.
The cities would become desolate.
Yet You do not forget the holy remnant.

As You are the compassionate God
Take away from my mountains all abominations.
Burn by the fire of Your Holy Spirit all the thorns of sin.
Sanctify me, and count me as Your holy mountain!

CHAPTER 7

THE JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL IS NEAR

Having spoken to the mountains of Israel about their bitter judgment, He started to confirm them that the end is near. Man, used to exploit God's long-suffering; assuming that no chastisement would ever happen. He preoccupies himself with daily affairs, with formalities of worship, or with leaning upon temporal authority. That is why God, in this chapter speaks of the following:

- 1- The end is near 1-11.
- 2- The end of social life 12-19.
- 3- The end of formal religious life 20-21.
- 4- The end of temporal authority 27.

1- THE END IS NEAR

St. Peter demonstrates to us the thoughts of the mockers who walk according to their lusts; who say: *"Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation"* (2 Peter 3:4). St. Paul also rebukes them; saying: *"Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance? But in accordance to your hardness and your impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"* (Rom 2:4, 5).

Here, God confirms that the time for punishment is near; that which the Jewish people thought will not come. That is why He repeats the phrases: *"An end! The end has come."* *"Now the end has come upon you."* *"Doom has come to you."* *"The time has come"* (Ez 7:2, 5, 6, 12). He spoke of the end from three aspects:

- 1- The end is to be very bitter 1-6.
- 2- The end is close 7-10.
- 3- The end is inevitable 11-15.

The end had come as their consciences got completely hardened; and in their life, there is no indication of repentance. That is why God will judge them according to their wicked ways and their abominations; as they did not listen to His prophets, nor repented their idolatry.

The end is going to be very bitter; not that God wishes for the bitterness of their souls, as He still loves them, but because that is the very nature of sin: trouble and grief. “*A day of trouble is near; and not of rejoicing in the mountains*” (Ez 7:7). No more songs; joy is taken away from them, and worries and afflictions came instead, through the dwelling of sin in their life. That He confirms by saying: “*I will repay your ways; and your abominations shall be in your midst*” (Ez 7:4). It is as though God confirms that what takes place is nothing but the nature of corruption of sin and abominations, that were chosen by man himself; it bears its punishment in itself.

This is what **St. Augustine** confirms, commenting on the words of the Psalmist: “*As wax melts, they are taken away,*” [They perish by the fire of the lusts. Here (in this world), there is a kind of concealed punishment for sinners, talked about by the psalm... Wicked lust is like burn, and fire. Will fire burn a garment, while the lust of adultery would not burn the soul? The Book says about the intended adultery: “*Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes do not burn?*” (Prov 6:27); and the apostle says: “*Therefore God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts*” (Rom 1:24). Behold the fire that makes them melt like wax.]

“*Doom has come to you, you who dwell in the land*” (Ez 7:7). As the heart of the wicked dwells in the land, and turns into dust; his turn will come through the rolling of the wheel of divine judgment, whose way no one can alter. The day of wrath will come; but whoever lifts his heart by repentance up to heaven, will not fall under wrath, but will enjoy the divine mercy.

The wicked that persist in their wickedness, falling under the wrath, they will not behold God - the Shepherd; but God - the Striker; who says: “*Then you will know that I am the Lord who strikes*” (Ez 7:9).

Proclaiming how close the bitter end is; that is the natural fruit of abominations, God clarifies what those abominations are, so that the believers can avoid:

a- **Pride**: “*The rod has blossomed. Pride has budded*” (Ez 7:10). The fall of the people into idolatry or into fornication, is caused by their pride. That is the beginning of the ailments of the soul that has destroyed the devil, and brought him down from the highest heavenly ranks to hell. It is likewise what has driven Adam and Eve out of Paradise. That is

why God humiliates the proud; not because He likes to humiliate them, but in order to amputate from them what belongs to the devil; so that, by the spirit of humility, they can repent, in abidance to the divine commandment.

b- **Violence** (oppression): *“Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness”* (Ez 7:11). If pride is more concerned with man’s relationship with God, oppression concerns man’s relationship with his fellow man; although the two of them are bound together, both referring to the hardness of heart, as a wicked nature that corrupts the inner life of man, and consequently his dealings with both God and man.

Pride brings man to humiliation, with no one to have compassion on him; and oppression will lead him to lose what he has, with no one to have mercy on him: *“None of them shall remain... nor shall there be wailing for them “* (Ez 7:11).

2- END OF SOCIAL LIFE

Because our temporal life may take our minds away from getting prepared for our encounter with the Lord, God will sometimes allow for affliction in what concerns our temporal life from all its aspects, in hope that we may return and think about God’s warnings and chastisements. That is why He speaks to them here about conditions of complete social and economic desolation and destruction of the city: The buyer will not rejoice, having no money to buy; nor the seller will rejoice, not resuming his trade. Trumpets will be blown for war, but no one will go to battle... a complete state of loss! The sword will chase them from outside, as well as pestilence and famine within. Those who survive, will not escape like strong lions, but like weak doves; All will mourn as they behold the complete desolation of the city; will lose all their physical, mental, and spiritual energies: *“Every hand will be feeble, and every knee will be as weak as water”* (Ez 7:17); They will enter into a state of grief, as though mourning someone dead; *“They will be girded with sackcloth... Baldness on all their heads”* (Ez 7:18).

Terror will prevail on them; their gold and their silver will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord. They will lose every hope, strength, and sanctification!

Their riches that used to preoccupy them away from the divine commandments, and the heavenly threats, are no more able to deliver

them, but will be a reason for their perdition; as they use it for idol worship. *“They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be like refuse”* (Ez 7:19). What is silver, but the word of God seven times purified? Instead of acquiring it in their heart, and of keeping it in their inner stores, they throw it unto the street and discard it. As for gold that refers to the heavenly things; instead of lifting their life up to fellowship with God, to experience the heavenly life within themselves, they stumbled over the heavenliness and their uncleanness grew!

3- END OF FORMAL RELIGIOUS LIFE

If those mentioned above have forsaken God because of their love for the world; and God has allowed for the destruction of the city and everything in it; others got preoccupied away from God through the formalities of worship. That led God to allow for the destruction of the seen temple, in hope that they might care for the inner temple in the heart.

God has delivered their cities and land to be looted by foreign hands; and now He is also delivering His temple to the foreigners.

As His people defiled His altar by idol worship; God delivered His temple to the foreign hosts (besiegers) and to the wicked of the earth to loot. He turned His face away from His house, because His children made it a den of thieves. *“I will turn my face from them, and they will defile my secret place. For robbers shall enter it and defile it”* (Ez 7:22).

Defiling the altar, does not stop at their adoption of idol worship, but extends to breaking the divine commandment, and to walking in oppression. That is why God counts their worship as defilement of His temple; having come out of hearts that are covered with blood and filled with violence. Because they defiled His temple, He allowed foreigners to defile their sanctuaries; that probably means the temple itself, or their own houses as sanctuaries. He says: *“Make a chain, for the land is filled with crimes of blood, and the city is full of violence. Therefore I will bring the worst of the Gentiles, and they will possess their houses. I will cause the pomp of the strong to cease, and their holy places shall be defiled”* (Ez 7:23, 24). He allows for the preparation of chains, namely, shackles to take them captives. Having bound themselves by the chains of their sins; they will be delivered into the hands of enemies, shackled with apparent metal chains. He might probably also prepare the chain of His divine justice to punish them!

Beside idol worship and breaking the commandment, they resort to self-deception by false prophecies. Instead of repentance, they seek from the prophets and priests, false peace and deception. That is why false prophets appeared who prophesied, not according to God's command, but according to what pleases the people. The Law disappeared from the priest, and the counsel from the elders... "*They say 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace*" (Jer 8:11).

Let every believer, every family, and also every church beware; because if accursed things get in, there would be desolation, and all would fall under the wrath of God! Then, it will be said: "*There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel*" (Jos 7:13).

4- THE END OF TEMPORAL AUTHORITY

"The king will mourn. The prince will be clothed with desolation. And the hands of the common people will tremble" (Ez 7:27). Sometimes man leans upon temporal authority, with the assumption that this way he would not be touched by God's chastisements; that is why God breaks that temporal authority; and the king mourns. Here he refers to Jehoiakin (27:12), to the former kings (43:7, 9); as well as to kings who would reign in the future (37:22, 24); but he does not refer to king Zedekiah (12:12, 21, 25). As to the 'Prince,' this refers to the ruler of the new congregation; namely the ruling rank of that time. As to the 'people' of the earth; before captivity, he referred to the non-Hebrews (Ezra 4:4; Nehemiah 19:31); while here, he refers to the Jewish people.

HOW LONG WILL YOU WAIT, O MY SOUL!

Your voice, O my God, never stopped!
It warns me: The end is near!
As the Architect of the whole world, You know its mysteries.
You confirm to me, that heaven and earth will disappear.
Yet, with my idiocy, I remain slothful and negligent.

Until when will you wait, O my soul?!
Will you escape to the mountains?
They are shaking!
Do You lean on your friends?
All hands will be feeble,
And all knees will be like water!

Do you trust in your silver and gold? They will not deliver you!
Do you lean upon the formalities and letters of worship?
Your God seeks the heart and depths!
Do you lean on authority? Everything will come to an end!
Until when will you wait, O my soul?!

CHAPTER 8

CONDITION OF THE TEMPLE

Having spoken to the mountains of Israel, proclaiming the desolation of the temple, the destruction of the cities, and the fall of the people under the sword, the famine, and the scattering; confirming that the end is near; He begins, after about a year from the previous prophecies and visions, to introduce a new series of messages (Chapters 8 to 11); in which God calls His people to repent, before the coming of these desolation. In this chapter, the prophet Ezekiel finds himself in the Spirit in the city of Jerusalem, and the Lord proclaims to him the condition of the Temple, to clarify that the cup of evil is full; and there is no possibility of postponing the chastisement. He spoke of:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- The image of jealousy | 1-4. |
| 2- The fall of the elders of the house of Israel into idolatry | 5-12. |
| 3- Women weeping for Tammuz | 13-15. |
| 4- Worshipping the sun in the outer court | 16-18. |

1- THE IMAGE OF JEALOUSY

After 14 months of his call (Ez 1:12), the Spirit carried him in a vision, to discover by himself what became of the Temple. He was sitting in his house by the River of Chebar, with the elders of Judah; probably following the end of the 390 days during which he lied on his left side, and prophesied about the sins of Israel. And before he starts lying for 40 days on his right side, to prophesy about the iniquity of Judah; He says: *“The hand of the Lord God fell upon me... and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire (man LXX) - from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the color of amber”* (Ez 8:1, 2). He was granted to behold the appearance of “the incarnate Word of God,” that is the “likeness of the appearance of Man;” He saw Him as fire from His waist downward; and full of splendor from His waist upward. It is as though, carrying the prophet to the Temple, to reveal to him the extent of abominations reached by worshippers, on all levels. The Lord, anticipating that the prophet may break down or may fall into despair, presented him with this vision, to ensure him that the incarnate Word of God, will surely act; being the Fire that consumes every evil and abomination. Filled with glory and splendor, He will bring His

people into His eternal glories. If the Temple has been defiled, yet the Lord of the Temple will come to grant purification and inner enlightenment to believers.

“He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy” (Ez 8:3).

The Spirit lifted him up between earth and heaven; It was not possible for him while sitting with the elders of Judah in captivity, to behold what was going on inside the Temple; nor while confined in the body (the earth), to behold the secrets of worshippers and their inner intentions. The Lord set him forth to what is beyond the bodily limits (the earthly limits). At the same time, he is not in heaven, as he did not enter into the perfection of its glory. By that He probably intended to say what the apostle Paul expressed about himself: *“I know a man in Christ... whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a one was caught up to the third heaven” (2 Cor 12:2).*

The Spirit brought him to the entrance of the temple to see the seat of *“the image of jealousy which provokes to jealousy.”* By the ‘seat’ he probably means the caved-in arches, in the houses and temples of the people of the east, in which they used to place the images of their gods. As to the image of jealousy, it probably means the image of ‘Asherah,’ the mother goddess of the Canaanites, that was put by Manasseh (2 Kings 21:7); and removed by King Josiah (2 Kings 23:6); although some believe it to be the image of ‘Tammuz,’ with which we shall deal in this chapter. It may also refer to any idolatrous image that may provoke the jealousy of God or His zeal for His glory; saying: *“You shall not bow down to them nor serve them, For I the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Exod 20:5).* That is probably why the glory of God appeared to Ezekiel, according to the vision that he previously saw; as though God intended to proclaim His glory, to ruin the vainglory of idolatrous worship.

The image here, is a symbol of the jealousy of God; as it is said, *“I the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Exod 20:5).* This divine jealousy is not an emotional reaction like that of man, that destroys the

heart; but it is a jealousy whose goal is to bring us back to God, to accept Him as our heavenly Groom. Such jealousy, He grants to His children and ministers, to say together with the apostle: “*For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*” (2 Cor 11:2).

2- THE FALL OF THE ELDERS OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL IN IDOLATRY

Beholding that image, the depths of Ezekiel were troubled, and became filled with bitterness; then he heard the divine admonishment: “*Son of Adam, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary?*” (Ez 8:6). What an amazing divine admonition; when the Holy Father sees how His children do their best to drive Him away. He brought them to the Promised Land, and prepared for them a place in the heavenly places; and here they are, rejecting Him and driving Him away, even from His sanctuary! That is what we do when we proclaim our rejection of His fatherhood, by accepting that of the devil, and bringing his works and abominations even into our hearts - the holy temple of God!

In order to show him greater abominations, God led Ezekiel to the door of the court. There the prophet saw a hole in the wall. By a divine command he dug into the wall, and there was a door, through which he entered, to see 70 men of the elders of the house of Judah, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan offering incense before every sort of creeping abominable beasts, in the dark; saying: “*The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land*” (Ez 8:12). Accusing God of forsaking the land, they resort to worship creeping abominable beasts; when they are actually driving the Lord away from His temple.

Shaphan was probably that famous scribe who helped King Josiah in his reforms before 30 years (2 Kings 22:3-10; Jer 26:24; 29:3; 36:10-12; 39:14). That good man unfortunately begot the corrupt Jaazaniah who now shares with the 70 elders in that great abomination. This is a portrait of someone who, after beginning his life, dedicating his heart to God, ends it, dedicating it to evil, sharing with the others their corruption. The 70 elders remind us of the 70 elders who helped the prophet Moses to lead the children of Israel, according to the divine

command by the Spirit of God; but here the devil is using the leaders to corrupt the life of God's people. How dangerous it is for the spiritual leadership to deviate from its mission; and instead of keeping the divine commandment, they get down to earthly things, crawl like creeping creatures, and preoccupy themselves with carnal lusts.

Why should I speak of the good man who begets a corrupt son, and of the diverted elders of Israel; when this is what sometimes happen in the inner life of man; when man - by a divine command - digs a hole in the wall set inside him; to be brought by the Holy Spirit to his inner depths, to discover a Jaazaniah within himself; namely the 'will.' Instead of embracing the holy and living 'will of Christ,' working on the account of the kingdom of heaven; he embraced an evil will, that gets down to the worship of earthliness, and to the bondage of body lusts. The 70 elders are the inner energies, that instead of lifting man up to the heavenliness, they get him down to what is unfitting.

The secret of that degradation is their saying: "*The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land;*" a feeling of isolation from God. "*He does not see us*" Putting the blame on Him, they say: "*He has forsaken the land.*" On the contrary, the source of strength in the life of believers, is feeling the company of God who sees us and never forsakes us, even in the moments of our wickedness. He does not forsake our land, because he is keen on continuously renewing it, to make of it His sanctuary.

3- WOMEN WEeping FOR TAMMUZ

Were the women weeping for the image of Tammuz because King Josiah threw it out; or they were partaking of the women of the Gentiles in weeping for it as a sort of worship? 'Tammuz' is most probably the god Sumerian Dumuzi, claimed to have fallen dead after wrestling with a huge ox. Or according to others, with a great dragon; and his sister, the goddess Inanna Ishtar descended to the lower world to restore her brother to life. Some believe that the Babylonian Tammuz is himself the Syrian god Adonis, that was centered in Gebal or Bablos, 12 miles north of Beirut. Celebrating his death and mourning for him, the Chaldeans offer human sacrifices, and perform sexual practices as a part of worship. The Jewish women used to share with those worshippers by weeping for him; then celebrating the restoration of life to him. The god Tammuz was mentioned in Daniel 11:37, and Zechariah 12:1.

It was a great shock to the feelings of the prophet, to see the women weeping for the calamity of an idol inside the house of the Lord, instead of weeping for their own sins.

If the elders fell into offering incense to creeping animals and unclean beasts; those women fell into taking part in worshipping Tammuz. While the elders symbolize the fall of human soul and its diversion toward material and carnal lusts, the women symbolize the flesh that collapses because of evil.

4- WORSHIPPING THE SUN IN THE OUTER COURT

What is more serious than the fall of the elders and the women, are the fall of the priests themselves. The prophet Ezekiel saw 25 men standing between the porch and the altar; with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; they were worshipping the sun. Those 25 men were probably the high priest and the 24 priests, the heads of the 24 Jewish priestly regiments. The weakness did not stop at the people, men and women, but extended to the priests; who instead of acting their role as intercessors for the people before God, they gave Him their backs; thus becoming a wall blocking the way to know God and to encounter with Him. The foremost spiritual leadership, have been diverted!

That was then, what aroused the wrath of God against the Jews. Instead of worshipping the living God, they set the image of jealousy; the people together with the priests on the highest levels have been diverted; both the spirit and the body were corrupted. That is why He said: *“The land was filled with violence;”* And instead of repentance, *“They have returned to provoke Me. Indeed they put the branch to their nose”* (Ez 8:17). Some believe that putting the branch to the nose, was a custom in the east, where the priests used to hold branches in their hands before their faces and close to their noses; While others believe that to be a common saying, that referred to provoking others.

THE SANCTUARY OF YOUR TEMPLE IS WITHIN ME

When I behold what Your people did, I get terrified.
They presumed that You do not see them, care for them, nor for the whole land.
So they resorted to worshipping creeping creatures and unclean beasts.
How lowly are our thoughts!

How great is our denial!

The elders have forsaken You and worshipped animals.
The women wept for the image of the god Tammuz inside Your temple,
Instead of weeping for themselves!

The priests gave you the back instead of the face.
They became worshippers of the sun;
disregarding that You are its Creator!
Instead of praying for the people, they became the cause of curse!

My soul is embittered!

Who are the elders, but my mind and my depths...
I became utterly corrupted!
Who are the women, but the emotions of my body, and its feelings that
became defiled!
Who are the priests, but the spirit of leadership that deviated within me!
Sanctify Your sanctuary, O the Holy One!
Sanctify my mind, my thoughts, my emotions, and my feelings!
Sanctify the gifts You granted me, O my Savior!
Sanctify my whole being; I am your temple!

CHAPTER 9

THE CONGREGATION OF THE MARKED

“The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of blood-shed, and the city full of perversity” (Ez 9:9). Yet, there were a remnant, although few, who were sighed and cried over all the abominations that were done within Jerusalem. These, God put a special mark (taw) on their foreheads, to keep them under His name, well pleased with them. This is the subject of the vision that God granted to the prophet Ezekiel; probably to reveal to him what He previously proclaimed to Elijah when his soul got greatly belittled; saying: *“I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal”* (Rom 11:4; 1 kings 19:18).

1- The six men	1-2.
2- The man clothed with linen	3.
3- The mark (the taw)	4.
4- Those who carry the mark (the taw)	4.
5- An act of chastisement	5-10.
6- The appearance of the Lord	11.

1- THE SIX MEN

“And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand” (Ez 9:2). Coming from the north, probably refers to the Chaldean attack from Babylon. And probably because the seat of the image of jealousy, was at the entrance of the inner court, that was facing north (Ez 9:3). It is as though, from wherever evil comes, the divine chastisement sets forth. Having been six in number, was probably because Jerusalem at that time had six gates; as though the attack would come through all the gates, with no place to escape.

The leaders of the Chaldean army were also six (Jer 39:3). Anyhow, the figure 6 most probably refers to incompleteness; that is why the number of the name of the beast is 666¹; three times indicating its incompleteness. Therefore those men are repaying the wicked with the wage of their wickedness, as being its natural fruit.

¹ Cf. The author: Revelation, chapter 13.

2- THE MAN CLOTHED WITH LINEN

In the midst of those who were chastened was someone clothed in priestly attire: “*A man among them was clothed with linen and had a writer’s inkhorn at his side*” (Ez 9:2).

In the old days, those who know how to write were few; a scribe used to accompany people of importance, or those who had a special mission, as a secretary. The ink pot was an animal horn filled with ink, formed of soot of oil lamps mixed with glue and water. The pen used to be of wood or bone. The scribe, ever ready to write¹, represents the Lord Christ who came to save us; and from whose stabbed side came blood and water, to record our names in the book of life.

When Ezekiel became “*a sign to the house of Israel,*” their iniquities, as though brought him paralysis, and made him lie motionless on his side. The Lord Christ, on the other hand, as He bowed his head to bear our iniquities, and to judge them in His body, it was not possible for death to seize Him, nor for sin to cling to Him; from his side He poured for us the mystery of life and an everlasting salvation! His side was opened to let us enter into His infinite love, to lift us up to the bosom of His Father, reconciling us to Him by His precious blood; And as the apostle Paul says: “*Therefore brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh. And having a High Priest over the house of God. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Heb 10:19-22).

The six men “*went in and stood beside the bronze altar*” (Ez 9:2), that symbolizes the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, bearer of the sacrifice; and in whose light the non-repentant will be judged. Through the sacrifice the repentant would enjoy the infinite mercies, and the wicked would fall under the everlasting judgment.

“*The glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the Cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple*” (Ez 9:3). The throne of grace is transformed into a throne of judgment; the divine grace was treaded upon, and the holiness of God was abused.

¹ Boyd’s Bible Handbook, p. 302.

3- THE MARK (THE TAW)

“And the Lord said to him, ‘Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the forehead of the men who sigh and cry over the abominations that are done within it” (Ez 9:4).

The word mark or (taw) here, namely a seal, is connected to the name of God. When the Lord Jesus Christ, presented His blood as an atonement for our sins, He brought us into the possession of God; and we became bearers of His name on our foreheads as the source of our sanctification; as the high priest of the old days, used to put a golden plate on his forehead, on which was written, “*Holy to the Lord,*” and without which he could not enjoy the divine sanctuaries (Exod 28:36-38). By it we can enter into the Fatherly bosom, to be kept against perdition. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, with which we are sealed in the sacrament of ‘Meyron;’ so that all our members would come in the possession of the Lord, and our souls would be kept in His divine protection¹.

The word ‘Mark’ or (Taw) attracted the attention of many, as the Greek letter “Taw” or T has the shape of the cross. **Origen** refers to this chapter, speaking of the ‘Mark’ as the sign of the cross². **Tertullian** speaks of it as being the sign of the passions of the Lord Christ, as the mystery of salvation from perdition³. [The Greek letter “Tou,” or our Latin letter “T,” has the same shape of the cross that he prophesied of as a sign of Jerusalem the true community⁴.] This is the sign that keeps the believer]; and as also said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [Being a believer, you should make the sign of the cross, and say ‘This is my only weapon, my medicine, I do not know any other⁵.] And [Let us hang the cross over our beds instead of the sword; Let us inscribe it on our doors instead of a bolt; and let it be around our houses instead of a fence⁶.]

St. Jerome says: [Ezekiel says: ‘Put the (Thaw) on the foreheads

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر.

² *Selecta in Ezek.*

³ *An Answer to the Jews 11.*

⁴ *Adv. Marcion 3 : 22.*

⁵ *In colos, hom 8.*

⁶ *In Tim. hom 2.*

of those who sigh, and do not kill anyone who has it. The devil will not be capable of striking anyone who has the sign of the cross on his forehead, as he can not wipe it away; whereas only the sin can.]

4- THOSE WHO CARRY THE MARK

He says about them, “*Those who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it (Jerusalem)*” (Ez 9:4). He does not say, ‘those who did not fall into sin, but confirms their hatred of it, and their continuous sighs over the abominations. **St. Augustine** believes that they present a living portrait of those who strive, who, although they live in the midst of abominations, and are exposed to them, yet they pray to get rid of them through persistent sighs. [Because they sigh and cry, they were marked on their foreheads; the forehead of their inner man and not the outer one; as there is a forehead for the conscience, as there is the one for the face... The sign, so as not to perish, marked those; as although they are not able to correct the situation, in the midst of which they dwell, yet they grieve for it. This grief, itself, makes them, in the eyes of God, separated from the wicked, even though, in the eyes of others, they are mixed with them. They carry the mark in a secret way, and not openly¹.]

The book of Ezekiel, that concentrates in most of its first chapters, on chastisement and punishment, often speaks of the remnant kept for God. It is the story of every generation, and the object of God’s care. God did not forget Lot and his household, when the abominations of Sodom and Gomorrah went too far, and were destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven (Gen 19); nor forgot Noah and his household, when He swept the earth with the great flood (Gen 6, 7). And when He was rejected by Jerusalem, the city of the great King, the Lord Christ found His comfort, in the time of ‘Pasch’ in the house of ‘Bethany.’

5- THE ACT OF CHASTISEMENT

“*He said: ‘Begin at My sanctuary.’ So they began with the elders, who were before the temple. Then He said to them, ‘Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain; Go out.’ And they went out and killed in the city*” (Ez 9:6, 7).

The divine command was out for chastisement; to begin with

¹ St. Augustine: Sermon on N.T. Lessons 57 :7.

killing the elders who work in the house of God; and as said by **Origen**: [Judgment starts with the house of God¹.] When the Lord called His servants, and delivered to each of them a certain number of minas, before going on business into a far country, in order to know how much every man would gain by trading, he started by the one to whom he gave 10 minas, and ended by him to whom he gave one mina. So God particularly cares for those who work in His vine to sanctify them, to make of them, living role models for His people. If these abuse their responsibility, they would fall before others under chastisement. How much is the need of the Church to care for the sanctity of its priests, and all those who work in the house of the Lord, before the other members of the congregation, to keep them from acting like the Pharisees and the scribes of the Law. Here God leaves His divine house defiled by the corpses of those killed; those who defiled His house with idolatry, and rebelled against Him.

6- THE APPEARANCE OF THE GIRDED LORD

In the Septuagint version it came that the man clothed with linen, was girded. And **St. John Chrysostom**² comments on this by saying that, being girded refers to unceasing vigilance; that is why God commanded 'Job' to gird himself (Job 38); and Moses, the prophets, and the Lord Himself appeared girded.

The prophet Ezekiel fell on his face (Ez 9:8) when he saw the corpses of the priests and people, and cried out bitterly to God, begging Him to spare the remaining few as He poured out His fury on Jerusalem. The Lord answered him that He is girded with righteousness. If He allowed for severe chastisement, yet He would not disregard the holy remnant; He already said: "*Do not come near anyone on whom is the mark*" (Ez 9:6)... The cry-outs of the prophet will not go in vain; he will hear the divine voice, saying: "*I have done as you (asked) from Me.*" (Ez 9:11).

HOW GREAT IS THE SEAL OF THE SPIRIT!

How great is the seal of Your Holy Spirit on me!
You had me sealed in the Sacrament of 'Meyron.'

¹ In Matt. hom 14 :10.

² In Eph. , hom 23.

And so counted me as Your possession!
Your cross on my forehead is the mark of membership in Your spiritual
corps!

And on it is the sign "*Holy to the Lord*"!
By You I became fearful;
No enemy can destroy me as long as I am with You!

I fear that my black attire may judge me;
I fear lest I become slothful, under the cover of the priestly attire!
Guard me; I am in danger!

How awesome are You, O the Holy One;
In chastisement, You start with Your priests;
You are firm with Your disciples for the sake of their edification!
But You are the High Priest working in them.
You are sweet even in Your chastisements.
The wounds of Your chastisements are sweeter than the kisses of the
enemy!
Let Your left arm chasten me, and Your right arm embrace me, O the
Groom of my soul.

CHAPTER 10

THE DIVINE GLORY DEPARTS FROM THE TEMPLE

The vision mentioned here is considered as a continuation of that mentioned in the last chapter; the prophet beholds the man clothed with linen, and a writer's inkhorn at his side. But the location has changed; Instead of the earthly holy temple, where the bronze altar, and the seat of mercy (the Ark of the Testimony) are; we see heaven itself and the divine throne.

1- Burning of the city

1-17.

2- The divine glory departs from the house of God

18-23.

1- BURNING OF THE CITY

Before proclaiming His complete departure from His house, the Lord gave His prophet the vision that He previously revealed to him by the River Chebar; namely the divine fiery chariot, previously called "the likeness of the glory of the Lord;" the details of which we have already dealt with in chapter 1; with the exception that the Living Creatures, he calls here "the cherubim."

What is new in this new vision, is that he saw the man - clothed with linen, and had an inkhorn at His side; who puts a mark on the forehead of those who sighed upon the abominations of Jerusalem (chapter 9) - went in among the wheels, under the cherubs. And another cherub was commanded to fill his hands with coals of fire from among the cherubim, and to scatter them over the city to burn it.

We said that the Man clothed with linen is "the incarnate Word of God," who came as a High Priest, wearing the priestly attire to offer the sacrifice of His love for the salvation of mankind. His going in among the two wheels, is a proclamation that He is the axis of the two Testaments: the goal of the Old Testament, namely the Law, being Christ; and the New Testament, namely the Bible, being the proclamation of the mystery of Jesus Christ. His descending beneath the cherubim, is a proclamation of the mystery of His incarnation; according to the words of the apostle Paul, "*You made Him a little lower than the angels*" (Heb 2:7).

Some people may probably ask: If the Lord came for our salvation, why would He command a cherub to take fire and scatter it on the city to burn it?

a- In this there is a proclamation of the fire of the mysterious sacrifice. If the Lord came as a Priest, yet, at the same time, He came as a Sacrifice to carry upon Himself the wages of our sins. He, Who knows no sin - accepted to bear its fire to destroy the city; though unable to destroy Him! That is why in the week of the holy Pasch, the Church concentrates on the prophecies of the Old Testament, that reveal the horror of sin and its destructive effects; in order to reveal the love of Christ, the bearer of the sins of the world. Yet, as much as the Holy Spirit proclaims to the human soul, the fatal fruit of sin, as much as it clings to Him, He who bore that fruit on her behalf.

b- That fire, probably also symbolizes the fiery Holy Spirit, sent to us by the Lord Christ from God the Father, to burn the corruption of sin; to destroy in us the old city; namely the old man; to set a new city or a new inner temple, in which the Lord dwells.

c- That act was a proclamation of burning the city by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:9), on the hand of Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard and servant of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. As the holy city forsook the holiness of life, it became worthy of destruction by the hands of the Gentile enemies.

It is to be noticed that when the Lord went in between the two cherubs, a cloud filled the outer court of the house. It is as though by the entry of the Son into incarnation, He proclaimed His glory in us, we who were outside. He says: *“And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even in the outer court, like the voice of the Almighty God when He speaks”* (Ez 10:5). As though the voice of the Almighty God also reached us, we, who were outside, through the coming of the Word to us.

“The wheel did not turn about as the cherubim went. They went in whatever direction the head faced, without turning as they went” (Ez 10:11). So goes the wheel of God’s chariot following the head; namely according to a divine plan. Neither man nor any creature can challenge God. On His divine throne, He grants grace and mercy to those who seek Him, and gives judgment against those who oppose Him; Who can challenge God?!

His chariot, full of eyes all around (Ez 10:12); does not go haphazardly; but His judgment is truth and justice; He is aware of the hearts; and nothing for him is hidden!

2- THE DIVINE GLORY DEPARTS FROM THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

“Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight” (Ez 10:12). The prophet confirmed that he saw the glory of God depart from His house; set forth with His fiery chariot away from the people who rejected His divine glory. It was not possible for the Lord to dwell where man persists on doing evil; *“For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial?”* (2 Cor 6:14, 15).

It was imperative for God to depart from His old temple that persisted on denial, to set in us a new temple, made by His Holy Spirit. **Origen** speaks of it, saying: [Let there be for the soul, an altar within the heart, on which sacrifices of prayer and burnt offerings of mercy are offered; on which the oxen of pride are slain by the knife of meekness; together with the rams of fury and goats of lusts. Let the soul know how to set within the holy of holiness of its heart, a lamp-stand that persistently emits light¹.]

The prophet saw the glory of setting forth from the threshold of the temple, and mounting up toward heaven. Yet he also saw the glory stop a while at the door of the east gate; as though waiting for a last chance, even after departing from the location, in the hope that they would probably repent, and come back. He departs from His house to ascend to heaven, without suffering any loss on His part; but seeking the benefit of mankind, its salvation, and its glory! The apostle Paul expressed that by saying: *“Do not grieve the Spirit.”*

How amazing! While the wicked does his best, to make God depart from his life; God does not want His glory to depart in haste from the heart of man; granting limitless chances to work in him!

¹ المؤلف: الكنيسة بيت الله، 1979، ص 39، 40.

I WISH YOUR GLORY WOULD NEVER DEPART FROM ME

You are not in need for my little heart.
Heaven and earth are full of Your glory!
I wish Your glory would not depart from me.
You, whom all the heavenliness glorify!

I confess to You with my tears and the sighs of my heart!
By my sins and transgressions, I drive Your glory away from myself.
I grieve Your Holy Spirit that dwells in me.
Yet You do not wish Your glory to depart from my heart!

You are in no need for proclaiming Your glory in me;
Yet Your amazing love wishes to proclaim it in me!
To be glorified in me!
And to make me worthy of the fellowship of Your eternal glory!

CHAPTER 11

THE GLORY OF GOD DEPARTS FROM THE CITY

The vision comes to an end. In the previous chapter, the prophet spoke of the departure of the glory of God from the temple - but not without cause; He clarified the extent of abominations to which the temple has reached (Chapter 8). And after putting a holy mark on the foreheads of His servants, to keep them against perdition (Chapter 9). He proclaims His departure from the whole city - also not without cause - He proclaims the evil that the rulers of Judah and the counselors have reached.

- 1- The proverb of the meat and the caldron 1-12.**
- 2- The corruption of the bad counsel 13-21.**
- 3- The glory of God departs from the city 22-25.**

1- THE PROVERB OF THE MEAT AND THE CALDRON

Before proclaiming the departure of God's glory from the whole city, the prophet referred to the twenty-five men who devised iniquity and gave wicked counsel in the city, contradicting what the prophet Jeremiah had previously proclaimed. Those men confirmed that the city was safe; and gave their counsel to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, with the help of the Pharaoh of Egypt (Jer 28:16); and to break the covenant between their king and the Chaldeans (2 Kings 26:13). They supported their counsel by saying: "*The time is not near to build houses; this city is the caldron and we are the meat*" (Ez 11:3). A vague statement, that the Septuagint version explains; that the city was safe, as proved by the fact that the conditions were stable and houses are built until very recently. By this they were contradicting the counsel of the prophet Jeremiah, who proclaimed the wisdom of accepting the divine chastisement, through the Babylonian captivity. They claimed that those captivated in the first stage, have been deprived of their land and their temple; whereas those who stayed back in the city, are building houses as a sign of their enjoyment of security.

Some believe that Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, knew that captivity was going to last for 70 years; and that they would settle down there, and

build houses in that foreign land. Yet many were against this issue; on the assumption that God would surely intervene and get them back home. Many false prophets appeared and encouraged them on that belief. Just as they did before captivity, when they calmed down the people's consciences, expecting that God would never allow His city and temple to be destroyed; they are now, as captivity became a matter of fact, still carrying the spirit of lying, assuring swift return.

They kept saying: "*The city is the caldron, and we are the meat*" (Ez 11:3); namely, if we are the meat, Jerusalem is the caldron that keeps and protects us against the attacks of the Chaldeans. But the Spirit of the Lord revealed to Ezekiel the falsity of this counsel; and proclaimed to him that what is in the caldron is not meat, but corpses of those killed, not by the Chaldeans, but as a result of that bad counsel. If they listened to the counsel of Jeremiah, and abided to the Chaldean's decree, the blood of those killed would have been spared. That is why the Lord confirms: "*The city shall not be your caldron, nor shall you be the meat in its midst*" (Ez 11:11). It is as though He is saying to them: Jerusalem would not keep nor protect you, as long as I, Myself, am against you,' "*I will judge you at the border of Israel*" (Ez 11:11). Although the city is My city and you take refuge in it, yet I, Myself, am against you, because you did not walk in My statutes, nor kept My laws. At the border of Israel, I will judge you; and you will find no protection or refuge. Thus, if God has clarified His departure from His house; namely, the diversion of the worshippers, on the highest level of leadership, He is going, as well, to depart from the whole city; because its rulers rejected the divine counsel, and forsook the commandment! If the temple refers to the soul, and the city refers to the body, that houses the soul within it; nothing would destroy the soul (the temple), like formal worshipping; and nothing would destroy the body, like the counsel of the wicked, and the rejection of the divine counsel.

It is noteworthy that, in order to expose the bad counsel, the prophet confirmed that "*The Spirit of the Lord fell upon him*" (Ez 11:5) - He, who knows even the hidden thoughts. If those men received the leadership, yet they lacked the Spirit of the Lord, who truly provides the good counsel; Ezekiel, on the other hand has got this divine Spirit that is able to lead. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says [Behold how the Holy Spirit

discerns, calls, and sends with authority¹]; [it is a living Spirit, that grants wisdom to speak and to preach².]; and [We should understand the words, “*fell upon me*” properly; to mean that it fell upon him with love; like when Jacob fell upon Joseph’s neck, on encountering him; and like what came in the gospels, about the compassionate father, when he fell upon the neck of his prodigal son, who returned to him (Luke 15:20)³.] This is the divine Spirit that fell upon the prophet, to grant him the Spirit of leadership, wisdom, and good counsel; for the sake of his love for the Lord, and his call for the people, to share with him that same love.

2- THE CORRUPTION OF THE BAD COUNSEL

The Lord proved the corruption of that bad counsel, through two aspects:

a- One of those counselors died, Pelatiah Son of Banaiah;’ something that terrified the prophet Ezekiel; because, if the counselor perishes, what would happen to the rest of the people?! That is why he fell on his face and cried with a loud voice, and said: “*Ah, Lord God! Will You make a complete end of the remnant of Israel?*” (Ez 11:13).

b- If those who stayed in the land of Judah, and were not carried into captivity (in its first stage), thought of themselves as more fortunate than those who did (like Ezekiel himself); yet they were deceiving themselves. They were happy because they stayed in their land, and beside the Temple that was not then destroyed. Yet this situation would soon change, and captivity would be consummated fast in a later stage, through which the city would be burned, the Temple would be destroyed, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be killed; whereas those who were carried into captivity, would not be forsaken by God. They were deprived of the divine sanctuaries in the city of the great King. Yet the King Himself became a sanctuary for them in their sojourn. “*I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone*” (Ez 11:16).

The Lord shall be their sanctuary; sanctifying their hearts with repentance; promising them salvation. Here God proclaims His amazing love for men; as, even after chastening them, and the departure of God’s glory from the temple and the city, He does not forsake the captives, but

¹ *Lect. Cat. 16:14.*

² *Lect. Cat. 16:13.*

³ *Lect. Cat. 16:30.*

promises to collect them in the land of their captivity. He is waiting for one single soul in captivity, to turn it into a temple and a little sanctuary that gives Him pleasure. He chastens, not to avenge, but to mend and renew!

Here, He transfers them to the Messianic salvation, saying: *“Then I will give them one (another LXX) heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in My statutes and keep my judgments and do them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God”* (Ez 11:19, 20).

He does not promise to bring them back from captivity to the Temple in Jerusalem - the city of the great King; but to what is far greater. He is going to destroy their old man, and replace him with a new man; they would become themselves the Lord’s temple and holy city; and His statutes and judgments would become their natural Law. That was what the Lord Christ presented to us in the holy water of Baptism; He brought us back from the captivity of the devil, and of sin; and made of each of us a new man, according to the image of our Creator. He took the stony heart out of our body, and gave us a spiritual heart of flesh.

He takes the stony heart; namely, the killing and literal understanding of the Law, that takes away from us all feelings; and gives us by the Holy Spirit a heart of flesh; namely, a spiritual understanding of the commandment, that grants us life. And as **St. Augustine**¹ says, quoting the apostle Paul: *“not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of flesh”* (2 Cor 3:3).

3- THE GLORY OF GOD DEPARTS FROM THE CITY

The temple was located on the eastern side of Jerusalem; but here, the glory of God stands in the middle of the city. He does not only depart from the Temple, but also departs from the whole city. He departs from the people, as well as from the priests, and from all who work in the temple. He departs from the flesh, as well as from the spirit!

The mount on which God’s glory stood, was the Mount of Olives, near Cedron (Zech 14:4). There it stood for a while, as though grieving for departing from His people who persisted on rejecting Him.

¹ *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon, 18:14.*

On this same mountain, the Lord Christ stood in the midst of the procession of His followers; saw the city and wept over it, saying: *“If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation”* (Luke 19:41-44). The Lord Himself stands to weep over the city that rejected Him, and it became itself rejected; it killed His prophets, so death entered therein.

**I WISH YOUR GLORY
WOULD NOT DEPART FROM MY CITY**

In the old days, Your glory departed from the Temple, then from Jerusalem.

Likewise, as sin infiltrates into my life,
My soul and my flesh lose Your glory!
Have compassion on me... I wish Your glory does not depart from me!

After Your glory departed from the Temple and the city,
You were waiting for just one soul to come back to You.
As you yearn to sanctify all by You!
Your love fills me with hope,
I sinned and caused Your Holy Spirit to grieve;
Your glory departed from my inner Jerusalem.
Yet there remains Your true promise:
‘I shall be a sanctuary for you!’

Your promise is amazing:
‘I shall make in them a new spirit!’
Let Your Spirit work in me;
Let Him renew my spirit and all my being!
Take the stony heart away from me,
And give me a holy heart of flesh!
You promised to set from stones, children for Abraham.
Here I am in Your hands; set from me a holy child!

CHAPTER 12

CONFIRMING THE CAPTIVITY

Having proclaimed the departure of His glory from His house and His city, God confirmed that captivation is near; by symbolic acts, likenesses and proverbs; advising the people and the rulers to listen to the true prophets, and to reject the counsel of the false ones.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- Going out of his place | 1-6. |
| 2- Covering his face | 7-16. |
| 3- Eating his food with trembling | 17-20. |
| 4- The people disregard the true prophecy | 21-28. |

1- GOING OUT OF HIS PLACE

Before the persistence of the people on disbelieving the prophets concerning the departure of the Lord from His house and His city, His forsaking the protection of His people, and allowing their captivation to chasten them, the prophet Ezekiel had - by a divine command - to materialize his mission through his behavior; to become a symbol to Israel. The Lord said to him: *“I have made you a sign to the house of Israel”* (Ez 12:6). And as the prophet said: *“I am a sign to you”* (Ez 12:11). By day, he set forth from his place and went to another place; in the hope that they may realize that they are likewise going to depart from their land and be taken into captivity. But by evening, he came back to his house in darkness, dug through the wall, and then departed in secret, carrying his belongings on his shoulders. It is as though, having disbelieved the fulfillment of captivation, it will happen by night; while they sleep in the midst of the inner darkness, and unprepared. Their king will also be carried away against his will.

So, the prophet, while portraying what would be the condition of the thousands of captives, people were regarding his behavior with astonishment.

Ezekiel became a sign to his people; doing his best to reveal what would come to happen to them. By going out of his house by night carrying his belongings on his shoulders; he proclaims that their sins would bring them into captivity: would make them lose their land, their possessions, their people, and their freedom; namely, they would lose their human rights. Our Christ became a sign; according to the prophecy:

“The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Is 7:14). From God the Father, He, in the fullness of time, came down from heaven to our earth as though by night; descended to us, we, who sit in darkness, carrying our sins on His shoulder; to reveal our captivity in the bondage of the devil. But He did not stop at revealing the bitterness of our condition, like what Ezekiel did, but He granted us freedom from servitude; and brought us back to His heavenly house, carrying a new nature, that enjoys the pledge of the eternal glory. It is as though the prophet only diagnosed the ailment and clarified its danger; whereas our Christ - the true Physician - offered His life on the cross, to heal us.

2- COVERING HIS FACE

Zedekiah, king of Judah, was to be carried by night to Babylon; yet, according to the prophet Jeremiah (32:5), he did not see it, as his eyes were put out in Riblah (2 Kings 25:4-7; Jer 52:8, 11). And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [He did not see Babylon although he was carried into it... as his eyes were put out in Judea. At the same place where he broke the oath, he got the punishment¹.] Because he broke an oath and betrayed a covenant, even though with a heathen; he got a double punishment: captivity and blindness. If this is the fruit of betraying a covenant with man, how would it be, if it is with God?! It makes the soul lose its freedom and inner insight; and man would submit to an inner servitude and an inner blindness.

3- EATING HIS FOOD WITH TREMBLING

Having become a sign to his people, the prophet Ezekiel performed another symbolic act to confirm the realization of captivity. The Lord commanded him, saying: *“Son of Adam, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and anxiety. And say to the people of the land, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink their water with dread, so that her land may be emptied of all who are in it’*” (Ez 12:18, 19). It is a horrible portrait of man’s life in sin, that consummate the previous portrait. Those who were carried into captivity against their will, have lost their inner insight; while those who were left in their land, have entered into a state of hunger with grief; and of thirst with anxiety. Sin makes man lose his

¹ *Concerning Statues, homily 19:11.*

inner fulfillment, his being watered together with his peace; that is why the Lord Christ says: *“I am the Bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst”* (John 6:35). He is the source of our inner fulfillment, and spiritual quench.

Ezekiel ate his bread with quaking and drank his water with dread and anxiety (Ez 12:18); whereas our Christ has offered His body and His blood, given as living Bread, that rids us of anxiety, and brings us into his eternal joy.

4- DISREGARDING THE TRUE PROPHECY

The false prophets made use of some popular proverbs to make people doubt the true prophecies; like: *“The days are prolonged, and every vision fails”* (Ez 12:22). By this popular proverb, many counted the visions of prophets as false and mere threats that would never be realized.

This way of thinking prevailed in all ages. The devil makes man doubt the divine word. In the apostolic era, some people doubted the second advent of Lord Jesus, saying: *“Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation”* (2 Peter 3:4).

Having been difficult for some people to believe this proverb, sowing doubt was tried by another way: not to reject the prophecy altogether, but to claim that it will be realized after a long time, not in their own time: *“The house of Israel is saying, ‘The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off’”* (Ez 12:27).

That is the work of the devil, continuously sowing doubt in God’s words; or claiming that it is of times far off, to make man live negligently outside the commandment. That is why the Lord always confirms: *“None of My words will be postponed any more; but the word which I speak will be done”* (Ez 12:28). The time is near, and all the words of God to us will be realized. And the word of God is clearly announced *“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be”* (Mat 24:37).

O LORD, MAKE ME A SIGN

O Lord, make me a sign!
You, who became a sign for my sake;
a sign in Your amazing virginal birth.
And a sign in Your resurrection from a sealed tomb!
Make me a sign, to testify to Your wonders in my new life!
Bring out of my barrenness, spiritual fruits!
To turn the corrupt tomb of my heart,
Into a heavenly sanctuary!
Grant me Your risen life,
To fill me with joy and praise!

You have made Your prophet Ezekiel a sign;
He came out by night, carrying his belongings,
After digging through the wall;
As though going into captivity.
And You My Lord, became a sign;
From God the Father You came;
You came down to our land,
As though to the shadows of death,
Carrying Your cross!
You dug the wall separating us from the Father;
And so set us free of captivity!
Grant me to become a sign;
So that my heart would set forth, as though from the darkness of sin;
Crossing the broken down wall, and the open gate of heaven.
Carrying You, my only and precious belonging!
Instead of escaping as though to captivity,
Your Holy Spirit would lift me up to the bosom of the Father.

You commanded Your prophet Ezekiel to eat his bread with quaking,
And to drink his water with dread and anxiety!
You counted him as though in prison,
Eating the bread of affliction.
I confess to You, O Lord, that I am a prisoner of my sins;
My bread has turned into bitterness.
Grant me Your heavenly Bread:
Your sacrifices body and blood.
To free me of my captivity;

And to grant me freedom, joy, and rejoice.
Let me abide in You, and You in me,
O the desire of my heart.
To become truly an amazing sign,
The work of Your hands!

THE THIRD SECTION

INIQUITIES OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

EZEKIEL 13 - 24

CHAPTER 13

THE GLORY OF THE FALSE PROPHETS

Having confirmed the actuality of captivity, proclaiming the necessity of believing the true prophets, the prophet Ezekiel began demanding the rejection of the counsels of the false prophets and the deceiving prophetesses.

- 1- The false prophets** **1-16.**
2-The false prophetesses **17-23.**

1- THE FALSE PROPHETS

The Jews knew two kinds of false prophets: The first kind represent the pagan worship, that openly oppose God; as for example, the prophets of Baal who were killed by the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:40); and a second kind who prophesied by the inspiration of their own hearts, their own feelings, and their own desires, under the name of God. They mostly uttered from their own invention, what would please the hearts of the king and the rulers, as a sort of flattery (1 Kings 22:5-28). This later kind is more dangerous than the former; as they are deceptive, talking as though bearing the divine inspiration, when they actually bear the inspiration of their wicked selves. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel opposed these.

He called them “*nebiem*,” meaning “foolish;” and here, we notice how the prophet plays with words: Instead of the word “*nebalim*,” he says, “*nebiem*;” like, in English, when we say ‘profitless’ instead of ‘prophets.’ The cause of their folly is that they prophesy “*out of their own heart*” (Ez 13:2); “*follow their own spirits*” (Ez 13:3); and not the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom.

If God warns His people against the false prophets; He, at the same time cares for the return of these false prophets from their wickedness and lies. As it is said by **Origen**:

[There is no kind of sin, that the Holy Scripture did not deal with, and did not clarify to its reader.

The word of God, sent for healing people, has to deal with all kinds of sins, and to address all kinds of people; so as not to deprive anyone of the beneficial medicine to heal his wound.

There are words that concern the people; others that concern the

high priests; the priests; the ministers and preachers. There are words that complement the good teachers; and others that rebuke the wicked; provoking some to proceed in goodness; and warning others to avoid descending to what is worse than what they have reached.

We have to interpret the words of God about the false prophets... and think about some of the preachers of the Church, whose talk or behavior, do not conform with the dogma they preach. They are false prophets.

We become very happy when we see the Holy Scriptures provoke us to keep away from iniquities; and become happier when we find the words of God touch and deal with some of the ranks of the Church; as we wish for healing from all sins.

“Son of Adam, prophecies against the prophets of Israel” (Ez 13:2). In Israel there were prophets, but only by name. But nowadays, in the true Israel, namely the Church, there are some false prophets and teachers, who are likewise covered by the word of God in this prophecy. If I happen to be one of these, I should change my behavior and keep away from iniquities so that I won’t be one of those condemned by the Holy Scriptures here, but to become one of the teachers of the Church, who faithfully preach the word of God.

“Prophecy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy out of their own heart” (Ez 13:2, 3). Here, the word of God refers to the teachers of the Church, who speak of what conflicts with the truth. To conform with the teachings of the Holy Spirit, through the disciples, speaking is not out of the inspiration of one’s own heart, but according to that Spirit that uttered in the apostles Paul, Peter, and all the other disciples and apostles.

But if we read the Bible, and apply on it our own concepts, without understanding the actual intentions of God, we would become false prophets, who speak out of the inspiration of their own hearts.

As to heretics... they display their heresies, based on the gospels and the apostles, interpreting them out of their own hearts, and not according to the Holy Spirit. They cannot say: *“Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him; but we have the mind of Christ.”* Or *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God”* (1 Cor 2:16, 12)¹.]

¹ Origen: *In Ezek. Homily 2:1-2.*

In the Septuagint version, it came: *“They are gathering together herds against the house of Israel; who say: In the day of the Lord, they shall not rise. They see false visions”* (v. 5, 6). **Origen** comments on this phrase, saying:

[They are gathering together herds that are separated from the Church of God, and from the house of Israel. They do not rise with the Lord Christ... because they see false visions... They shall not rise with Him; as those truly risen would say: *“We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Rom 6:4). *“As we were given the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit”* (2 Cor 1:22). We were only given the pledge of resurrection; as none of us has been risen the perfect resurrection...

They were not yet given the Baptism of resurrection, because they are false teachers and prophets... everything they see is false; they cannot see true visions... they have false visions of the Scripture¹.]

“Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you,” says the Lord God. My hand will be against the prophets who envision futility and who divine lies” (Ez 13:8, 9). By human wisdom, they wished to gain the people and to hypnotize their conscience by false prophecies, on the expense of the divine Truth; to lose God as their support, and to be uprooted from the people themselves. *“They shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord God. Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, ‘Peace!, when there is no peace”* (Ez 13:9, 10). They intended by flattering the people, to utter smooth words that they are in peace and security; to end up being deprived of the people, of the city, and of the land.

St. Ambrose says: [In the Gospel we find certain examples of peace that is rejected by Christ, who Himself says: *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you”* (John 14:27). As there is peace that puts no rock of offense; and there is peace that does that. Peace that puts no rock of offense, is the peace of love. Otherwise, it is that of appearances (hypocrisy). That is why the prophet says: *“Peace, peace, and there is no peace”*. Let us then escape

¹ Origen: *In Ezek. Homily 2:5.*

from the peace of the wicked; as they plot against the innocent, and gather together to afflict the righteous (Wis 2:12). They suppress the widow and crush her humility¹.]

They utter smooth words. And as **Origen** says that when the books are opened (Dan 7:10) “*by our words we will be justified, and by our words we will be condemned*” (Mat 12:37); according to the saying of the Lord Christ. The false teachers offer corrupt views that will condemn them and will not justify them. What apply to words, apply also to works; as “*Some men’s sins are clearly evident, proceeding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden*” (1 Tim 24. 25); “*Their thoughts accusing or else excusing them*” (Rom 2:15). Therefore, let us watch our words, our works, and our thoughts, lest they condemn us as false teachers!

St. Jerome says: [Those who came on their own, and were not sent, are “*thieves and robbers*” (John 10:8)².]

Those false prophets became like “*foxes in the desert*” (Ez 13:4) known for deception; that desolate the city under the veil of ‘peace,’ instead of building it by good counsel. Instead of “*building a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the way of the Lord*” (Ez 13:5); namely, instead of building strong walls to protect it; “*they plaster it with intemperate mortar*” (Ez 13:10). It may appear strong, yet for sometime; but would soon fall; because when rain pours; the mortar would fall, and the stones of the real wall would be exposed, to appear as hailstones to crack and be torn down by the stormy wind (Ez 13:11). The deceiving layer of mortar, put by the false prophet would fall, and the wall would completely collapse. That is why the Lord says: “*Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘I will cause a stormy wind to break forth in My fury; and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and great hailstones in fury to consume it. So I will break down the wall you have plastered with intemperate mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered. It will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I am the Lord*” (Ez 13:13, 14). So the fury of God will come down on those who plastered it, on the mortar they have put, and on the wall itself.

¹ The Prayer of Job and David, 3:3:6.

² Homily 87.

Here, we also notice, how the prophet Ezekiel plays with words, saying: “Say to those who plaster it with intemperate mortar (tapel), that it will fall (napel) (Ez 13:11).

That mortar, are the smooth deceptive words: The prophets “*see visions of peace for her when there is no peace*” (Ez 13:16). And as came in Micah: “*Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who make My people stray; who chant ‘Peace,’ while they chew with their teeth*” (Mic 3:5); and in Jeremiah: “*Because from the least of them, even to the greatest of them, Everyone is given to covetousness. And from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace!,’ when there is no peace*” (Jer 6:13, 14).

Origen believes that the foxes (or jackals Ez 13:4) refer to the devils¹. the Psalmist says: “*They shall go into the lower parts of the earth; they shall fall by the sword. They shall be a portion for jackals*” (Ps 63:9, 10); “*Foxes spoil the vines*” (Songs 2:15). It is as though those prophets, ministering on the account of the kingdom of the devil, are counted as his soldiers, or as though evil spirits that spoil the vine of God.

Origen says:

[Let us move on to another verse that rebukes those false prophets and teachers. I pray to be spared this rebuke, through your prayers for me. What is this rebuke?

“*O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts*” (Ez 13:4). A fox is a useless, shrewd, wild, and fierce animal. The Savior says: “*Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons, and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected’*” (Luke 13:32).

‘Samson’ used those foxes against the Philistines; “*He went and caught 300 foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grains of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves*” (Judges 10:24). False teachers are deceptive and wicked, like those animals.

If I am like that, I would not only be a fox, but I would be a fox

¹ In Number, homily 11:5.

in a desert! Those useless deceptive hypocrites dwell in the desert and desolate places; always in secluded locations (from God). If God dwells in a soul, and fills it with the Holy Spirit, no heretic dogmas will enter into it. But where the Lord Christ is absent, the poisons of those wrong and evil teachings would prevail¹.]

2- THE FALSE PROPHETESSES

The Holy Bible mentions prophetesses to whom holy talents were given; like ‘Miriam’ the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, who took the timbrel in her hand and led the women in a song of conquest, after crossing over the Red Sea (Exod 15:20); ‘Deborah’ who was a judge of Israel (Judges 4:3, 4); Isaiah’s wife (Is 8:3); ‘Huldah’ the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14); ‘Anna,’ the daughter of Phanuel (Luke 2:36); and the four daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:9). But here, the prophet Ezekiel speaks about false prophetesses who turned the word of God into trade and personal profit: “*Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive? And will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies*” (Ez 13:18, 19). It is a bad trade, in which souls are sold cheap, for handfuls of barley or for crumbs of bread; delivering innocent souls to death; and keeping alive evil souls that are worthy of death.

They trap human souls by smooth words, as soft pillows for every head; as though setting traps to catch birds. That is why God intervenes for the sake of His name, that is profaned by those wicked women; and for the sake of the poor souls that fall victims to them. God will tear up their pillows, and rescue the people from their snares.

In the Septuagint version it came: “*Woe to those sewing pillows to trap souls*” (v. 18). Those who, according to **St. Ambrose**² sew the old with the new. But our Christ came and made all things new (Rev 21:5); because He is “*the Resurrection*” (John 11:25); the “*the Firstborn from the dead*” (Col 1:18). He does not forsake us in our old man with his killing letter.

¹ In Number, homily 11:4.

² Cf. The Prayer of Job and David, 3:7:24.

YOUR COMMANDMENT TO EVERY SOUL

You, as a Priest, present Your commandment to me.
And You are also presenting it to the people!
My soul is very precious in Your sight,
Whether I am a master or a slave,
An elder, young or child,
A man or a woman!
Your love is amazing for every human soul, O Lord!

You warn me against false prophets and the deceptive prophetesses.
And at the same time, You ask them to repent and to return to You!
You hate deception;
Yet You seek the souls of those who deceive!
You hate heresies;
Yet You yearn for the repentance of the heretics!
You are amazing, O Savior of the world!

Grant me not to fall into the deception of smooth words.
Not to lean on the pillows of the false teachers,
And not to trust in the sweetness of their tongues, full of poison!

Keep me, lest my thoughts, words, or works deceive me!
As I shall give account of every vain thought,
And of every barren word,
And of every useless work!

CHAPTER 14

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Having spoken of the necessity of receiving the counsel of the true prophets, and rejecting the words of the false prophets and the deceptive prophetesses, He started to clarify the need for holy people to inquire a true prophet with a repentant heart; then God would listen to them. The one who inquires should be holy; and so should be the prophet. If the one who inquires transgresses, he will be responsible for his transgression; and likewise, if the prophet went astray, he will be punished for his iniquity.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- Individual iniquity of the one who inquires | 8. |
| 2- Individual iniquity of the prophet | 9-11. |
| 3-Man's commitment to his actions | 12-20. |
| 4- God's care for the repentant remnant | 21-23. |

1- INDIVIDUAL INIQUITY OF THE ONE WHO INQUIRES

When the elders of Israel came to the prophet to inquire, the word of God to him was: *"Son of Adam, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?"* (Ez 14:3). They came to ask God and not the idols; to ask Him through Ezekiel, His true prophet. Yet how would God respond to those, who worship the idols in their hearts?! Their concealed iniquity became a stumbling rock that closes the door of God's response before their faces. God responds, not according to the heart of the prophet, but according to the multitude of their idols that reigned over their hearts (Ez 14:4, 5).

He did not respond to their request, to provoke in them the spirit of repentance... *"Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations"* (Ez 14:6). He frankly tells them, that He will not respond to them before they drive out the idols from their hearts; so that God Himself reigns in the heart.

2- INDIVIDUAL INIQUITY OF THE PROPHET

"If the prophet is induced to speak anything, I the Lord have induced that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel." And they shall bear their

iniquity; The punishment of the prophet shall be the same as the punishment of the one who inquired” (Ez 14:9, 10). I have no partiality. If the one who inquires sins, I shall punish him according to his evil heart. And if the prophet sins, I shall punish him according to his heart. God condemns the priest as well as the people; the minister as well as those he ministers to.

3- MAN’S COMMITMENT TO HIS ACTIONS

God’s words came to him saying: “*Son of Adam, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,*’ says the Lord God” (Ez 14:13, 14).

He says, “*When a land sins.*” What does He mean by “*land*”?

a- **Origen** believes that God does not mean the inhabitants of the earth.

b- According to him, every sinner is considered as ‘*earth*’: [The sinner is called ‘*earth*,’ as it was said to Adam: “*You return to the (earth), for out of it you were taken*” (Gen 3:19). Thus we can say that committing sin makes man as ‘*earth*’... You notice how the earth quakes and trembles... And we, like the earth, quake and tremble because of our sins¹.]

The Lord confirmed that when a land sins against Him and betrays Him, and He sends famine on it; and in it were these three: ‘*Noah, Daniel, and Job,*’ they would deliver no one but themselves by their righteousness. Then He confirmed that if a land is struck by wild beasts that its inhabitants are bereaved these three men would not deliver neither sons nor daughters. For a third time, if God brings a sword on that land, and cuts off man and beast from it, again these three men would not deliver neither sons nor daughters. Then finally, and for the fourth time, if God sends a pestilence into that land, and poured out His fury on them by blood; these three men would not deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they will only deliver themselves by their righteousness. The Lord, in the Book of Ezekiel, is confirming the personal responsibility of man for his faith and his life. We saw how the

¹ In Ezek. hom 4:2.

one who inquires (the people) bears his own iniquity; and so does the prophet. Here he confirms that even if a righteous man is there, he would be delivered, but he would never deliver even his own son or daughter, if the children do not follow righteousness like their fathers. Even though that generation was the seed of Abraham, the Patriarch and the man of faith; yet that would benefit them nothing. And if the generation before them, have diverted to idolatry, that would not commit their descendants to God's wrath; they are only responsible for themselves. That, will be reconfirmed more clearly in chapter 18.

In the light of this chapter, we understand the role of the saints in our life. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [If we are slothful, we cannot gain our salvation even with the help of others... I say this, not to deny the intercession of saints, but to provoke you to forsake your slothfulness and your leaning upon others, while lying on your backs.] And he also says: [How great is the blessing of the prayers of the saints, if we also work.]

Intercession on behalf of the people was a living part of the work of prophets and priests; the prophet Samuel says: *"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you"* (1 Sam 12:23). And at Mizpah, as the Philistines gathered together against the children of Israel, they said to Samuel: *"Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines"* (1 Sam 7:8). Also Moses kept interceding for his people, until the Lord said to him: *"Let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation"* (Exod 32:10). The prayers of saints support the striving soul that is ready to repent; but in case it persists on its stubbornness, it would benefit nothing. The Lord says to the prophet Jeremiah: *"Do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you"* (Jer 7:16; 11:14). God, who said in the days of Hezekiah, the righteous king: *"I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake"* (2 Kings 19:34), did not utter these words in the days of increasing evil, when He delivered the city to Nebuchadnezzar.

Why has God chosen those three men: Noah, Daniel, and Job?

Probably that is because they represent a sample of righteous

men, who live among wicked people. Noah lived among a corrupt generation who was worthy of the great flood. Job kept his righteousness amid a pagan atmosphere. As for Daniel, he was either that Daniel who lived pure, together with the three young men in the land of captivity, far from every possibility of holy life; or he probably was Daniel, mentioned in the tablets of 'Ras-shamra,' dating back to the year 1400 B. C.; a Phoenician wise man and a judge, who used to deal with justice in the cases of widows and orphans¹. By that, the Lord would have rebuked the Jewish people, presenting three non-Hebrew righteous men: Noah and Job, before the time of Abraham; and Daniel, a Phoenician. It is as though, He wished to confirm to them His impartiality; that He wanted the salvation of every soul, whatever its race is, as long as it responds to His love and commandment.

St. Augustine believes that through those three men, God undoubtedly presents symbols of three categories of people who would be saved: [I believe that Noah represents the righteous rulers of the Gentiles, because of his preparations for the great flood, as a symbol of the Church. Daniel represents the righteous in purity; and Job represents the righteous in marriage².]

Origen³ believes that each of those three men passed through three stages: a stage of happiness, followed by one of grief and suffering; then a return to joy and happiness. So also man, he starts his spiritual life by divine comforts, to be followed by a narrow way and troubles that bring him into new spiritual glories. This is the way of the glorified cross, or that of the fellowship with the suffering Christ, risen from the dead; namely, the way of salvation.

As to the **bitter punishments** under which man falls because of his sins, these are four:

- a- Famine, that cuts off man and beast from the land (Ez 14:13).
- b- Wild beasts that make land desolate, and mothers bereaved (Ez 14:15).
- c- The sword that cut off man and beast from the land (Ez 14:17).

¹ W.H. Morton : "Ras-Shnmra - Ugarit and Old Testament Exegesis" Review and Exposition 45 (1048), p. 70-72.

² On Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism.

³ In Ezek. hom. 4.

d- A pestilence and pouring out God's fury on the land by blood (Ez 14:19).

Mentioning both “**man and beast**” is because “man” refers to the mental or psychological side; and “beast” to the physical side. It is as though sin that deprives man of God, makes him lose both the temporal and the spiritual blessings; namely those of the inner soul, as well as those of the body.

Famine, loss of security (wild beasts), loss of peace (the sword), and loss of health (pestilence) are all natural fruits that man gets from sin, that separates man from God, the source of his fulfillment, security, peace, and health. That is why, when **St. Augustine** feels hunger and worry, he resorts to God, praying:

[O my God,... You made my soul capable of accommodating Your infinite glory; so that nothing else would fill it but You!.]

[O my God,... You made us for Your own sake... That is why our heart will stay always, troubled, worried, and with no peace, until it finds comfort in You¹.]

Those plagues, with the symbols they carry, represent four aspects resulting from the work of sin in man's life; namely: hunger, that represents the loss of knowledge of the Truth; wild beasts that represent the dominion of the devils over the soul, to destroy every virtue in it, and to make the soul as hopeless as a woman who has lost her child; the sword, that represents man's loss of his vitality, to become useless like a corpse; and finally pestilence, as man becomes like germs, that spread corruption all around. It is as though these plagues symbolize man's deprivation of the Truth, his submission to the dominion of the devil, his deprivation of every vitality, and becoming a focus of corruption for others surrounding him.

4- GOD'S CARE FOR THE REPENTANT REMNANT

Every time God speaks of chastening His people, or pouring His fury on them, because of their increasing sins, He would never forget to emphasize His care for the repentant remnant.

¹ المؤلف: الحب الإلهي ، 1967، ص 43.

I SINNED! I SINNED!

My God... How difficult it is for me to confess!
Expose to me my hidden depths; so that I should cry out:
I sinned! I sinned!

In the old days, the people used to cast the blame on the priests;
And the priests used to cast the blame on the people!
And every generation think that it is punished for sins of their fathers.
As for me, I confess to You:
I sinned! I sinned!

My father will not intercede on my behalf, if I neglect my salvation!
And I will not be punished for his weaknesses!
I admit to You my personal responsibility!
I sinned! Forgive me, and absolve me!

The prophet Moses interceded on behalf of his people.
And the prophet Samuel kept on praying for them.
A cloud of witnesses surrounds us,
who intercede and pray for us, and support us!
Instruct me on how to care for my salvation,
Then this cloud would become my support!

I complain about myself to You; Sin has destroyed me:
A famine for God's word has come on me!
I became like a desolate land, in which evil thoughts dwell, like wild
beasts!
The sword of sin strokes my depths, destroying my talents!
By my sin, I became like a pestilence, corrupting those around me.
I confess my sin to You;
The responsibility is all mine!
Save me... Rescue me!

CHAPTER 15

THE VINE BRANCH

THE DIVINE VINE

God often fondly addresses his people as His divine vine that he planted by His right hand, cared for it, and let it in need for nothing. God chose the vine, because among other trees it is seen as little and soft. Its wood is not useful for construction, for making musical instruments, tent pegs, or even for use as fuel; as fire totally consumes it within moments. Its only privilege is its productive fruition. If it does not produce fruits, then it is completely useless. That is what God demands for His Church to bring forth the precious fruits of the Spirit.

In the book of Isaiah, He proclaims that He set His vineyard on a very fruitful hill; dug it up and cleared out its stones; planted it with the choicest vine; built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it (Is 5:1, 2). He granted it all the possibilities for fruition; fenced it with His Holy Spirit; rid it from its stony nature; and granted it the tower of divine knowledge... He then expected it to bring forth good grapes; but it brought forth wild grapes instead. For that He proclaims: *“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge please between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned. And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.’ For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel; And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, weeping”* (Is 5:3-7).

Likewise, the Psalmist describes the people of the Lord as ‘God’s vineyard,’ that, although He cared for by His right hand; yet it did not hold itself... He says: *“You have a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River. Why have you broken down*

her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it” (Ps 80:8-13).

That is what literally happened to the people of Israel; as well as what symbolically happens in the life of man. Literally, the Lord set His people in Egypt, as the first plant, on a nation’s level, to be referred to Him. Then He moved that plant from there, on the hand of the prophet Moses, by a long and a strong arm. He cast out several nations before its face, to replant it in the Promised Land, where its people increased in number and filled it; embraced the mountains of Israel and the cedars of Lebanon; and extended east of the Mediterranean Sea, to the River Jordan. But, having been diverted from God, He broke down its hedges, and into it many strangers entered to humiliate it. It became defiled through the entrance of heathen worship into its temple; and in place of God’s care, the beasts of the wilderness inside it devoured its children.

From a symbolic aspect, the believer, planted in Egypt (the world), is brought up to the higher Jerusalem, to the heavenliness, by the mighty hands of the Lord Christ Himself; God cast out before him all the hosts of darkness; so that they would have no place in his heart and He made him live like a king, with the authority to tread on the serpents and scorpions; to embrace in himself the holy mountains (the prophets of the Old and the New Testaments, the cedars of God), to enter into a fellowship with the saints who live as straight as the cedar trees. His life is extended to the Sea and the River; namely to the canals of the holy waters, or the blessed River of Baptism, so as to live on the Spirit of the Holy God, as the source of enlightenment and permanent growth. Such a soul, if it does not abide in what is given to it until the end, it becomes lost, and turns into a toy for the devil! That is why the apostle warns us saying: *“Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls”* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

THE BRANCH OF VINE

The Church of the Old, as well as that of the New Testament, was called a vine among the trees of the forest, having carried the Bunch of grapes of life - Jesus, the Lord of Glory - who is the Source of our joy and rejoice. It bore fruit among the fruitless trees of the forest. In the present chapter, the old people were called the ‘vine branch,’ above every branch of the trees of the forest; that was supposed to bear grapes,

but, unfortunately, having been cut off its origin, it became dry and useless. It dried up, and the fire devoured both its ends as well as its middle; would it then be useful whatsoever?! “*When it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for any work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?!*” (Ez 15:5)

First: It was cut off its origin, to lose its life, and to become of no use except to be burned by the fire of judgment. And as **St. Augustine** says: [The branch is only useful for one of two things: either to produce grapes, or for the fire. If it wishes to escape getting consumed by the fire, it is committed to keep its place and abide in the vine¹.]

Second: Burning the two ends, is a reference to what happened to that people because of their sins: The kingdom of the north (Israel) fell in the year 721 B.C. to the Assyrian captivity; and the kingdom of the south (Judah), fell to its first captivity in about the year 597 B.C. What had befallen them was because of their separation from God - the inner consumption because of sin; that must inevitably be followed by whole consumption.

LET ME ABIDE IN YOU, O TRUE VINE

Let me abide in You, the true Vine.
Without You, I dry up, and would be of no use except for fire!

Here I am, a bruised reed; do not break me!
Mend my ways by the touches of Your healing hand!
Grant me Your Holy Spirit to work in me!
Instead of dryness, I would bear living fruits.
And instead of death, I would breathe eternal life!

You have watered Your vine by Your precious blood.
You have planted Your Church, a good vineyard.
Surrounded it with the fences of Your Holy Spirit.
Presented it with every possibility of fruition!
Work in me; to bear Your fruits in me, O the Holy One!

¹ *St. Augustine: IN Ioan., tractate 81:3.*

CHAPTER 16

THE PROVERB OF THE BETRAYER BRIDE

Having spoken of the personal responsibility of every man for his own sins; both on the level of prophets, and on that of the people, He presented us in this chapter a portrait of the corrupt life of the people - which also applies to the human soul; God's work with them, selecting them as His bride; and paying back the divine love with treason and adultery.

Origen¹ says that we are like slaves under one master. We learn a lesson, when we see another slave who has preceded us in our master's service, punished for his mistakes, or rewarded for his good work. Likewise the Holy Bible here, presents to us Jerusalem as an example by which the Church of the New Testament should benefit, to avoid doing its mistakes, and falling in its abominations.

1- Jerusalem, the despised girl	1-6.
2- God betroths her as His bride	7-14.
3- Her betrayal of Him	15-34.
4- The punishment for betraying	35-51.
5- The way to reform: Shame!	52-58.
6- A promise to accept her anew	50-63.

1- JERUSALEM, THE DESPISED GIRL

As this chapter actually represents the song of free salvation, that God offered us, despite our abominations and the defilement of our heart; and keeps on offering it all along the days of our sojourn, until He brings us as a holy bride to the Lord Christ; this song begins by recognizing our abominations; in order to receive His work in us. God's words starts as follows: "*Son of Adam, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations*" (Ez 16:2). This is the way that St. John the Baptist prepared for the Lord Christ, when he came to expose human weaknesses, to make the sinners accept the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, to expose our weaknesses before our insight, in order that we confess them. And as St. Anthony the Great says: [If the soul surrenders itself to the Lord with all

¹ In Ezek. hom. 7:1.

its strength, the good Lord would reveal to it these abominations and faults, one by one, in order to avoid them.] And **St. Ephraim the Syrian** says: [You cannot listen to His words, as long as you have not yet known yourself¹.]

What were her abominations? “Say, *‘Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite’*” (Ez 16:3).

Judah and also Israel were boasting that they came from the seed of Abraham - as an elected race. But the Lord here proclaims to Jerusalem that it did not spiritually come from the seed of Abraham nor born from him; but from the land of Canaan; her father was an Amorite, and her mother was a Hittite. They have fallen to the abominations of the Amorites and the Hittites, and were bound to them through evil; Thus they were deprived of their sonhood to Abraham, the father of believers; as well as of their reference to God; and became in truth as children of those two peoples. And as **Tertullian** says: [They are not descendants of those two peoples; but called their children, because they followed their evil ways; those whom He called on the mouth of the prophet Isaiah; saying: “*I have nourished and brought up children*” (Is 1:2)².] And **St. Augustine** says: [As the Jews followed the wicked lead of the Amorites and the Hittites, they found parents among them; not because they were born by them, but because they shared their judgment, having walked in their ways³.]

And **Origen** says: [As Jerusalem committed such sins (idolatry), it is no more worthy of attain the promises of God⁴.] It became a Canaanite, from an Amorite father and a Hittite mother, outside the circle of divine promises. So would be whoever accepts the teachings and false philosophies of the world, away from the Spirit of the Holy Bible; He would stay outside; not counted as a holy Jerusalem, but a Canaanite, Amorite or a Hittite!

Origen noticed that God in rebuking Jerusalem, said that its father is of a certain race (an Amorite), and its mother is of another (a

¹ المؤلف: تلميذتي لأب اعترافي، 1974، ص 63.

² *An Answer to the Jews*, 9

³ *In Ioan, tractate 53:9*.

⁴ *In Ezek. hom. 7:1*.

Hittite). As wherever sin exists, there would be schism, dissension, and segregation; and wherever virtue is, there would be unity. He says: [Wherever sins are, there would be offense, dissension, heresies and disunion; and wherever virtue is, there would be unity and union; where believers are with one heart and one spirit. Let us frankly say, that the origin of evil is in multitude, and the beginning of reform is to live in unity... to become as one body and one spirit. But if we are not united, and say: "*I am of Paul, I am of Apollo,, or I am of Cephas;*" We are divided, segregated, and would never reach up to the level of those whom unity gathered together. The same way the Father and the Son are One; so will be all those who have one spirit¹.]

As to how Jerusalem started committing abominations; He says: "*As for your nativity, on the day you were born, your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt, nor swathed in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born*" (Ez 16:4, 5). The newly born baby, according to the customs of the old days, used to be lightly rubbed with salt, and his hands and legs are left swathed for several days, assuming that this would make him stronger and immune against germs. That is why we hear that the Virgin St. Mary rapped Baby Jesus in swaddling cloth (Luke 2:12).

Not swathing a baby or rubbing him with salt, implies that he is undesired². It is a painful portrait of the whole mankind; as man is born with abominations working in him. No human is capable of cleansing him of his defilement, or cover him with a swaddle, or to carry him away from his shame! That is why the Psalmist cries out saying: "*I was brought forth by in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*" (Ps 51:5); And the prophet Jeremiah says: "*Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from God*" (Jer 17:5). Thus man feels completely helpless and unable to be sanctified when nobody helps or supports him, then God Himself, has to interfere.

Some Church Fathers believe that his saying. "*Your navel cord was not cut*" refers to the initial sin, when Eve fell into greed and then

¹ In Ezek. Hom. 9:1.

² Boyd's Bible Handbook, p. 302.

seduced her man; and also refers to the sin of preoccupation with eating and drinking in which the children of Israel fell (Exod 32:6). The apostle Paul says: “*The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play*” (1 Cor. 10:7). **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Indeed, Adam, through not controlling his belly, was cast out from Paradise; and for the same reason, the great flood in the days of Noah occurred¹.] And he also says: [Neither the flesh nor the food are from the devil, but only exceeding their limits is, because through it, the crafty devil provides his victims with several evils².] **St. Moses the Black** says: [You should know for sure, that when man excessively eats and drinks, and loves the vanities of this world, he would be deceiving himself if he thinks he is able to gain any goodness³.] **St. Isaac the Syrian** says: [It would be safer to sit with a hyena, than to sit with a greedy man, who is never satisfied⁴.]

2- GOD BETROTHS HER AS HIS BRIDE

God confirms to the human soul: “*And I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood... I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love*” (Ez 16:6, 8). When the Lord passed by and found her naked with nobody to cover her nakedness, He approached and betrothed her as His bride: “*I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became mine,*” says the Lord God” (Ez 16:8). The Holy One had the compassion to descend to us in the land of affliction, stretched his hand to our weakness, granted us union with him, and offered Himself a Groom to us. Concerning this **St. John Chrysostom** says: [As I already said, that He, the great and mighty, was ready to have a harlot - the human nature - as His bride! Man would be condemned, if he covets a harlot. So, how could God chose a harlot to be His bride?! What did he do?! He did not send her an archangel, an angel, a cherub, or a seraph, but He descended Himself to approach to the one He loved... Because she was unable to ascend up to Him, He Himself came down to the harlot, and did not hesitate to hold her hand, drunk as she is... How did He come? He did not come, proclaiming the essence of His nature, but truly became like that harlot

¹ In Matt. , hom. 13:2.

² In Cor., hom. 39:17.

³ بستان الرهبان (طبعة بني سويف 1976) ص 164.

⁴ المرجع السابق، ص 165.

(except for sin), not merely according to intentions but truly He became like her, to spare her getting terrified and fleeing away when she sees Him! He came to the harlot like a man¹.]

What did God offer her?

“Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing were of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,’ says the Lord God” (Ez 16:9-14).

It is a magnificent portrait of the work of the Lord Christ with us; especially through the holy water of Baptism, the anointment of ‘Mayron,’ and the sacrament of the Eucharist. We have previously interpreted this text in our book *‘The Holy Spirit between the New Birth and the Continuous Renewal.’*

He brought her into the holy water of Baptism to wash off her blood of sin (Ez 16:9). And as **St. Augustine** says: [By our birth from water and the Holy Spirit, we are purified from every sin; either from Adam, through whom all sinned, or by our own action and words; as we are washed from it in the water of Baptism².] By the oil of the holy anointment, He anointed her. By His Holy Spirit, He brought her into His possession. He gave her the seal of the Spirit; clothed her by the clothes of righteousness; provided her with footwear, to walk in God’s way; clothed her with linen, a sign of purity, and with silk, a sign of righteousness. He provided her with jewelry, not of this world, yet as an pledge of the spirit that bestows beauty on the soul; He put a bracelet on her wrist, a chain on her neck, a jewel in her nose, earrings in her ears, and a beautiful crown on her head. These are all the works of the Holy

¹ الكنيسة تحبك (طبعة 1966) ص 53، 54.

² Epistle, 178 :28.

Spirit in our inner life; to sanctify all its senses and energies on the account of the kingdom; to have her hands stretched to work without slothfulness; her neck bowed to joyfully carry the burdens of others; her nose opened to smell the fragrance of heaven; and her ears to be adorned by hearing the divine commandments. As to the crown of her beauty, it is the Lord Christ Himself, who fills her mind and guides her behavior. This is the work of God in us! He provides us with gold and silver; namely, offers to us the 'heavenly life,' referred to as gold; and the word of God, that is seven times purified as silver; fulfills our souls with the Holy Body, not to be hungry for anything else! By that the soul becomes exceedingly beautiful, worthy of entering the kingdom of her Groom, as a queen adorned by the perfect splendor that her Groom bestows upon her; and acquires a name, that of her Holy Christ.

3- HER BETRAYAL OF HIM

After providing her with all these possibilities, she dared to betray Him: *"You trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it"* (Ez 16:15).

Here He talks about the spiritual harlotry, which is the diversion of the soul after someone other than her Groom; binding with temporal things, at the expense of her relationship with God. Concerning this **Origen** says: [Harlotry in its wider sense, includes every form of sin. There is harlotry, when the soul enters into a mutual relationship with God the Word, and unite with Him in a kind of marriage, then become corrupted and defile herself with someone else, an enemy of Him who reigned on her with faith - the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Groom and husband of the chaste and pure soul. And as the apostle Paul says: *"For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ"* (1 Cor 11:2, 3). Therefore, as long as the soul unites with her Groom, listens to His words, and clings to Him, she would gain from Him the fruit of the word... If the soul conceives by the works of Christ, she would give birth to children, for whose sake she was told: *"She will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control"* (1 Tim 2:15)... Indeed, blessed is that fertile soul that partook of begetting the Word of God, became

harmonious with Him in His bosom thus give birth to genuine descendants that produce purity, righteousness, patience, meekness, love, and every honorable descent. But if the soul miserably forsakes the holy sanctuary of the Word of God, enters into the bosom of corruption, and gets deceived by the vanity of the devil; it will surely give birth, but to children, of whom it is written, that they are corrupt and imperfect¹.]

Origen² believes that harlotry here means forsaking the marital home, or deserting the holy household. Such are the sinners, by whose spiritual harlotry, they are cast outside the tabernacle of God; while the saints stay inside.

Whoever binds himself to the Word of God, and walks in His obedience, will live as though in the spiritual marital home; while he who binds himself to false philosophies will deny himself the heavenly wedding, and will be considered a harlot.

This is the spiritual harlotry, committed by the soul, by forsaking God her Groom, and resorting to the devil and his ways. As to the features of this spiritual harlotry, these are:

a- **Pride**: *“You trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it”* (Ez 16:15). The beginning of fall is pride. When man trusts in his human arm, and thinks high of himself; then the grace of God will forsake him, and will become a toy for every sin. **St. Isaac the Syrian** says: [Who loves dignity, will not be able to escape the causes of abasement³.] **St. Moses the Black** says: [Whoever thinks that he is blameless, contains in himself all defects⁴.] And **Pope Gregory (the Great)** says: [Indeed, the soul that trusts in its beauty, and thinks of itself as righteous, plays the role of a harlot for her fame; as whatever it does, is not to proclaim the glory of its Creator, but to seek its personal glory.]

b- **Defiling the body**: *“You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them”* (Ez 16:16). If the garments in the Holy Bible refer to the body,

¹ In Num. hom 20:2.

² In Ezek. hom. 7:1.

³ بستان الرهبان، ص 318.

⁴ المرجع السابق، ص 325.

God will punish him, who makes out of his body ‘high places,’ namely places for evil; on which to offer sacrifices to the idols. The devil would find in the body several places for himself, through the eye, the ear, the hand, the belly etc. Our good body would turn into instruments of unrighteousness for death. That is why the apostle Paul says: “*Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God*” (Rom 6:13). “*For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness*” (Rom 6:19). “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (Rom 12:1).

c- **Defiling the sanctities of God:** “*You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images, and played the harlot with them*” (Ez 16:17). So God punishes His bride, not only because she is a traitor, but also because she had taken His treasures and sanctities, and used them in betraying Him.

Origen says that she took the things, from which are made what is for her glory and pride, about which Moses wrote in the book of Numbers: golden censers, cups, and lamp stands... had them all melted, and made for herself male images for corruption and adultery, so became herself an adulteress. This is the literal interpretation. But symbolically, **Origen** believes that the soul is replacing the concepts of the word of God by false concepts; the wicked melt the divine word presented to them for their glory, and replace the truth by vanity, and God by other images. God presented us with the Law and the prophets, for our inner glory; but we abuse them¹. The soul abuses His gold and silver (Ez 16:17); His oil and incense (Ez 16:18); the food that He gave her - the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey (Ez 16:19)! The denying soul takes the gold and silver of Christ, to make for herself images; namely, uses those heavenly things (gold), and His gospel word (silver), not to lift herself up to the divine life, but for the service of temporal thoughts. Thus faith, according to her, would become, not as union with God, but a mean for earthly goals.

¹ Cf. *In Ezek. hom. 7:2.*

As an example we mention the motive of love, that God grants to humanity, and cause to grow in the believer's life. Some transfer it into carnal lusts; namely, use the gift of God on the account of the kingdom of darkness.

What is said about love applies to anger; it is also a gift, a feeling by which man should direct toward himself against sin; yet some use it against other fellow men.

"You took your embroidered garments and covered them" (Ez 16:18). What are these beautifully embroidered colorful garments, but the qualities of mercy, humility, patience, and forbearance. This is the adornment that beautifies and covers the believer.

Origen says that the heretic covers his killing philosophy with deceptive outer adorned garments; bearing the image of purity, chastity, and meekness, in order to catch the simple and to lead them to perdition of their whole life; he would be like someone who covers up the pagan idols with beautiful adornments. [Let us beware of the heretics, who adopt the appearance of a perfect life... For Satan, is like the catcher of sparrows, who offers delicious food that would help him to catch them. The devil has some kind of false purity and meekness... to seduce the human soul; by false talk, he can entrap it in his net and various snares; He strives to deprive man of everything¹.]

Again, he says that the devil does everything that looks good... mixes and distorts things, to lead the human nature to perdition. Whoever is keen for the salvation of his soul, would never go after these deceits².

"You set My oil and My incense before them" (Ez 16:18). The literal meaning is: Instead of using the oil and incense, for the golden light stand and the golden altar of incense, they are used in pagan worship. The oil refers to the anointment of the Spirit, and the incense to the prayers of the Saints. It is as though, instead of enjoying the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and lifting the heart up in prayer, so that the believer would enjoy a fellowship with God, in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, his worship would turn into how to please others thus becomes their slave; a kind of worship, through which he loses the most holy and precious things through this servitude... A

¹ In Ezek. hom. 7:3.

² In Ezek. hom. 7:3.

servitude to vain glory, and seeking the compliments of others. As to the oil and incense of the Lord, refer to the worship that, instead of becoming a spiritual ladder to rise up to eternity, it would be replaced by formalities serving personal desires.

As to the kinds of food, these are divine gifts presented by God that are diverted from their spiritual goal. *“Also My food which I gave you - the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you - you set before them as sweet incense”* (Ez 16:19). What is this food, presented by the Lord, but His word in the two Testaments; the Law and the prophets are the pastry of fine flour; and the New Testament is the honey. The word of God in the Old Testament is the food on which we subsist; without which, we could not have recognized our Christ in the New Testament - the “Desire of nations;’ the delicious honey in the depths of the soul! Yet the heretics use even the word of God, the spiritual food, to corrupt the minds of the simple!

Indeed, how hard it is for God to see the means of salvation, of spiritual growth, and union with Him, become the very ones for destroying the relationship with Him; and even used on the account of His enemy!

d- Destruction of the energies of both the body and the soul:

“Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured..., that you have slain my children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire” (Ez 16:20, 21). The people literally did that, when they offered their children, who are God’s children, sacrificed them, and caused them to pass through fire, in pagan worship. Women used to offer their newly born babies as sacrifices to the god ‘Moloch;’ deliver them to the priests, who, amid the thundering noise of drums, place them on the bronze arms of the god, red hot with fire. No one could hear the screams of the babies, but all joyfully danced and committed adultery... as rites of worship to the god! The children who should have been brought up as children of God, sanctified in the truth, were sacrificed to the devil!

Symbolically, the boys and girls, whom we bear to the Lord, then we sacrifice them on account of the devil, these are the energies of the soul and body, sanctified by the Holy Spirit; then we defile in evil abominations. The believer, receiving love from the hand of God, who is

Love, to make his heart big enough to accommodate love for God and people; sometimes diverts it to become a carnal lust, at the service of his own desires, on account of the devil. Thus. All the motives, tendencies, and energies of the soul, flared up by the Holy Spirit, to become like sons and daughters to God, working in the heart on His account, if diverted, would come to be at the service of the kingdom of darkness.

e- **Turning into pagan temples:** *“You also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be abhorred”* (Ez 16:24, 25). The soul, instead of being a holy temple for the dwelling of God, it becomes a shrine for the devil, and sets for him a high place in every street. Wherever it goes, it harbors no thought other than carnal lust and world love. At the head of every road it builds a high place: in its family life, in work, and in its social relationships. It does not think of what concerns God, but of what concerns sin.

It abhorred its beauty created by God; and as **Origen** says: [The human soul is very beautiful; because God created it... saying:“ *Let us create man in Our image and according to Our likeness”* (Gen 1:26). Are there a more beautiful image and likeness? Yet some worthless adulterers attracted to its beauty, tend to corrupt it. That is why the apostle Paul says: *“But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”* (2 Cor 11:3)¹.]

He also says that the heretics corrupt the beauty of the soul and the mind by their wrong thoughts, causing the soul to be corrupted by falling in spiritual adultery².

f- **Committing sin and never be satisfied:** *“You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshy neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke me to anger... You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; Indeed you played the harlot with them and still was not satisfied. Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied”* (Ez 16:26-29). Although Egypt and Assyria were adversaries, yet the Jews were then insatiable,

¹ In Ezek. hom. 7:6.

² In Ezek. hom. 7:6.

accepting the gods of Egypt and, at the same time, the gods of Assyria. Just like someone in whom sin turns into a sickness; he sins right and left with no goal nor satisfaction; commits sins opposing to each other at the same time: fall into the sin of pride and self-esteem; and at the same time, has his heart flare with evil lusts. “*How degenerate is your heart?!, says the Lord God* “ (Ez 16:30).

g- **Shamelessly committing sin:** God likens her to ‘*a brazen harlot*’ (Ez 16:30), who shamelessly commits sin. She invites strangers, and instead of asking for payment, she offers presents and bribe: “*Men make payment to all harlots, but you made your payment to all your lovers, and hired them to come to you from all around for your harlotry* (Ez 16:33). Man may refer to need, to poverty, or to certain material or social situation, as excuses for committing sin. But getting used to sin, man may commit it at the expense of his health, or his material or social advantage!

When **St. John Chrysostom**¹ wrote to a friend who fell into adultery, and broke the vow of ‘Theodore;’ intending to rescue him from despair, he found in this chapter a living portrait of God’s love, that calls those who fell in such horrible level of adultery, to return to Him.

St. Jerome, in one of his letters, sees in this description, a symbolic portrait of an idle soul, that leaves itself prone to every kind of evil everywhere. That is why he warns us against idle life, saying: [In Egypt, monasteries set a by-law, to accept no one who is not ready to work; considering work, not only a necessity for body needs, but for the salvation of the soul as well. Do not let your mind wander in vain thoughts; to become like Jerusalem in its harlotry, which offered herself to everyone who passed by (Ez 16:25)².]

Origen³ presents to us a symbolic interpretation of the brazen harlot who shamelessly commits harlotry... that she likens a religious person who sins, yet keeps on his religious appearance. The sinner would spiritually play the harlot, and confesses his sin with humiliation; while that religious person would play the harlot; and shamelessly keep pretending to be religious.

¹ *Letters to the Fallen Theodore 1:13.*

² *Epist 125:11.*

³ *In Ezek. hom.8.*

What are the presents that the harlot gives to her lovers? She takes what is her husband's and gives it to them. That is what the heretics do, when they misunderstand the word of God and His gifts, then use them on behalf of the devil's kingdom.

4- PUNISHMENT OF BETRAYAL

a- **Chastening in public:** We have previously dealt with how God covers our iniquities. He advises us in private, hoping for our repentance. But if we persist on sinning, He allows for our public chastening; yet not for the sake of defamation (Chapter 5). Here, as she became in her harlotry "*a brazen harlot*" (Ez 16:30); and entered into a sick situation of insatiable desire for sin, committing it with everyone passing by, God had to deal firmly with her, to chasten her, for the sake of her salvation; saying: "*Surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, and all those you hated; I will gather them from all around against you, and will uncover your nakedness...*" (Ez 16:37).

b- **Corruption left to destroy itself by itself.** Those with whom she took pleasure, will be the ones who destroy her life: "*I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places. They shall also strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewelry, and leave you naked and bare*" (Ez 16:39).

Things that man thinks are the subject of his happiness, turn themselves, to be the source of his misery; and what he assumes to be the source of his satisfaction, he will finally find them to be the cause of his hunger, thirst, nakedness, and disgrace!

c- **God's anger against her:** By rushing to evil, evil in itself will not only be man's punishment; but, deprived of being with God, he would then fall under the fury of God. Yet the bitter most, and the most severe level of God's fury, is for God to "*be angry no more*" (Ez 16:42); namely to disregard him altogether. If God gets angry with us, it is because he loves us and wishes us to unite with Him; but persisting on rejecting Him, He will be angry no more, and we would lose His divine love: "*I will lay to rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more*" (Ez 16:42).

Concerning this, **St. Jerome** says: [The harshest level of God's anger toward sinners, is when He is angry no more... As "*For whom the*

Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb 12:6). A father advises his son; and a teacher would not correct the ways of his student if he does not love him and finds him promising. And when a physician stops caring for a patient, this would be a sign of his despair of him¹.] And he says: [In other words, when you were just a harlot, I jealously loved you; but having many lovers, made me despise you, and I would be angry any more. In the same way, man becomes jealous about his wife when he loves her, but when he is jealous no more, that would mean that he loves her no more. As though he would not be saying God’s words, *“I will visit their transgression with the rod”* (Ps 89:32); but he would be saying His words, *“I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry”* (Hos 4:14)².]

d- Proverbs would be quoted against her: *“Indeed everyone who quotes proverbs will use this proverb against you: ‘Like mother, like daughter’”* (Ez 16:44). When a believer falls in sin, he would most probably be worse than a non-believer; because he takes what is God’s, through the strong possibilities granted to him, and uses them for evil; so he becomes like a proverb before many. Here, God admonishes the people, because they have forsaken Him as their father; *“Their mother became a Hittite, and their father an Amorite,”* being referred to them through sharing their abominations; Their older sister became ‘Samaria’ (Israel or the northern kingdom), that for a long time walked in the way of evil; and their younger sister became ‘Sodom,’ that became worthy of being burned with fire. She even became more evil than all these; saying: *“You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you became more corrupt than they in all your ways”* (Ez 16:47).

He concentrates on the following sins (Ez 16:49):

I- **Pride** (Ez 16:49, 50): That motivates to rebellion against and muting God. Its end will be fall. **Origen** says: [Which is then the greatest of all sins? Surely it is that which led to the fall of Satan. What is the sin that caused the collapse of such greatness? The apostle Paul says: *“Being puffed up with pride he fell into the same condemnation as the devil”* (1 Tim 3:6). Pride and arrogance are the sins of the devil; because of which he fell from heaven to earth; that is why, *“God resists*

¹ Epistle 68:1.

² On Ps., hom 51,

the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jam 4:6). What causes man, who is made from dust and ashes, to be proud; forgetting his destiny; forgetting how he is but a fragile vessel; disregarding the dirt in which he sinks, and the wastes that come out of his body?¹]

Origen rebukes the proud priests; saying: [How do they forget humility once they became priests?! It is as though they were ordained to stop being humble! The Holy Bible says: “The higher you are, the more humble you should become” (Ben Sirach). The congregation has chosen you, as you were bowing your head! They made you a ruler; so do not get arrogant. Be like anyone of them. Be humble, and humiliated; Escape from pride, as it is the source of evil.]

II- Fullness of food (Ez 16:49): That is when man seeks material fullness, and leans upon the temporaries; disregarding all spiritual values.

III- Unconcern (Ez 16:49): Namely putting the conscience to rest. Instead of confessing sin and presenting repentance, man says to himself, “Peace”... namely he chooses for himself the wide way and the spoiled life, instead that of repentance and of bearing the cross.

5- THE WAY OF REFORM

“You who judged your sisters, bear your own shame also; because the sins you committed were more abominable than theirs; They are more righteous than you..... When I bring back their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then I will also bring back the captives of your captivity among them.... When your sisters and their daughters return to their former state; then you and your daughters return to your former state” (Ez 16:52-55).

Origen noticed that the way of return to the former state; namely to the state that was before captivity, necessitates bearing a feeling of shame, for the sins and abominations that man committed. Commenting on the previous statements he says:

[Man should not practice something shameful; but everything good by nature should be directed to God in true confidence. Yet, as we, as humans, often commit sin, we should feel shame; we should humbly

¹ In Ezek. hom 9:2.

look down with our eyes, because of our abominations; and should not proceed with such a bold face, as though we would do nothing wrong.

It is better for man to feel shame after committing sin; especially that the deceiver, the evildoer, often makes man behave as if he is doing the right thing, instead of remembering the due punishment. From our daily life, we see and learn, how often men, after committing sins, do not regret what they did, but vainly defend their corruption... That is why it is said: *“Bear your own shame also”* (Ez 16:52). Do not think that this phrase was said to Jerusalem alone, but is said to everyone of us who pretend to do no wrong... who is worthy of shame before the righteous God who tests the hearts and minds (Ps 7:9). Then one feels shameful when he discovers precisely the thoughts, acts and words... he hears the prophet saying: *Bear your own shame*. When one does something shameful, God makes him feel shame¹.]

If God commands Jerusalem to bear her own shame, it is to provoke her to confess the abominations she committed; and by repentance He would get her back from the state of shame to that of dignity; get her back home from her captivity; saying: *“They will return to their former state.”*

Origen comments on this saying: [It is a disgrace for a citizen to be exiled from his country... The just Lord acknowledging this says to him who commits abominations: You who is worthy of punishment, Do not receive your exile with grief; as murmuring against punishment makes you unworthy of mercy. You should rather admit that you are worthy of the punishment you suffer. When you humbly acknowledge the justice of the verdict issued against you, you would then be worthy to get mercy from the One who is capable, after condemning you, of returning you to your former state. As it is possible for a great ruler to release those who are in prison or exile; it is more so for the Lord of the universe, to give back the former dignity to him who lost it, provided that he confesses his sin, and admits his worthiness of the pains he suffers².]

Origen presents a practical example, in case someone is excommunicated from the Church - either of the clergy or of the congregation; If they murmur and provoke the people to follow their

¹ In Ezek. hom 9:1.

² In Ezek. hom. 10:1.

lead, “*they would treasure up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath*” (Rom 2:5). But if they receive this verdict in complete humility and with patience; whether their excommunication is just or not; leaving the decision on that to God; they will gain mercy from Him; and would most probably be returned to their former state (Church membership), with more glory and dignity. When we bear the shame here, we provoke, in the coming age “*the tender mercy of God*” (Luke 1:78), to take away this disgrace. While he, who murmurs here, would fall into eternal shame.

Origen also noticed that returning from captivity to the former state, would depend on the state of man... He started with ‘Sodom’ and her daughters, then Samaria’ and her daughters, and finally ‘Jerusalem’ and her daughters (Ez 16:55). Who knows more, will get more strokes: The knowledge of the Gentile Sodom is less than Samaria (the heretics); and knowledge of Samaria is less than that of Jerusalem.

[The closer we are to God... the farthest we would be from Him if we sin, and the more severe and horrible would be our punishment; God’s judgment is just, ‘The lowly humble will be forgiven through mercy; while the mighty would be severely punished’ (Wisd. 6:7). Whoever is the least of all (1 Cor 15:9), would be worthy of swift mercy¹.]

Origen comments on the words of the Holy Bible: “*Your elder sister, is Samaria, who dwells with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who dwells in the south of you, is Sodom and her daughters*” (Ez 16:46). [As the virtue makes me a brother of the Lord Christ; craftiness (evil), would get me several sisters, all sinners. When Jerusalem started tending toward sin, she did not yet have Samaria nor Sodom as sisters; but as she sank deep in wickedness... she became in the middle of her two sisters, the elder Samaria, and the younger Sodom².]

To demonstrate the extent of Jerusalem’s abominations, He said that, by all the abominations she has done, she has justified her sisters like Samaria, as He says: “*Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all the abominations, which you have done... They are more righteous than you*” (Ez 16:51, 52).

¹ In Ezek. hom. 10:2.

² In Ezek. hom. 9:3.

Origen says:

[Actually, Samaria and Sodom were justified by the abominations of Jerusalem... Let us beware that, on Judgment day, those of less abominations shall judge us; and we, in our turn will judge others. Only One will be justified before all; and before whom no one will be justified. Sodom is justified by Jerusalem who committed more abominations; and Jerusalem may be justified by another city worse than she is... Who would justify the antichrist that will appear having more abominations than all others?!...

No one will be justified before God: Abraham was righteous. So was Moses and others. Yet if compared to Christ, they would not be considered righteous. When they come close to His light, their light will be counted as darkness, as a lamp look dark in sunlight. The light of the righteous would shine before men, but would not shine before Christ. As He did not just say, "*Let your light shine;*" but said, "*Let your light shine before people;*" as the light of the righteous could never shine before Christ¹.]

6- A PROMISE TO ACCEPT HER ANEW

After proclaiming this horrible portrait of Judah, in her brazen public harlotry, that surpassed the evil of the Gentiles; and presenting her chastisement, He opened before her the door of hope by returning to Him through the New Testament, in which she enters into our Lord Jesus Christ: "*I will establish an everlasting covenant with you;... Then you shall know that I am the Lord; that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done,' says the Lord God*" (Ez 16:60-63). This is the everlasting covenant, in which we shall never remember our sins anymore; but will find in it atonement for all we have done; then our heart will find peace forever.

I AM NOT JUST ONE AMONG BILLIONS

Now, I realize that I am not just one among billions!

I am the object of Your love and personal care!

My sin cast me on the road, like a discarded trash!

No one to look at me; or ask about me!

¹ In Ezek. hom. 9:3.

No one to carry me out of the mud of the road, and away of its risks!

You passed by me, and looked at me with Your divine eyes!

I felt the warmth of love;

I heard You whispering in my ears: "*Your time is the time of love.*"

You carried me on Your divine arms;

You cleansed me in the water of Baptism;

You anointed me with the oil of Mayron;

You became my garment, in which I hide!

You became my food and my drink! my wealth and riches!

My joy and the joy of my heart!

You shone with Your splendor on me!

Then my depths became exceedingly beautiful and glorified!

You counted me as Your son;

A holy bride for You, O King of Kings!

You made me a queen;

To sit in the heavenly places!

You made me a member in Your Holy Body!

And set me a second heaven for your joyful kingdom!

Who can care for me as You do?

Who else is for me on earth and in heaven?

I yearn for You, O the Groom of my soul!

CHAPTER 17

THE VINE AND THE TWO EAGLES

In this chapter, captivity is described through a special riddle of the vine and the two eagles:

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|--|--------|
| 1- The riddle of the vine and the two eagles | 1-10. |
| 2- Interpretation of the riddle | 11-21. |
| 3- A promise of the new kingdom | 22-24. |

1- THE RIDDLE OF THE VINE AND THE TWO EAGLES

The Lord commanded the prophet Ezekiel to pose a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel, that carried a living and accurate portrait of what has been realized in the first captivation of Judah; and of the events and situations that followed: “A great eagle with large wings, spreading them out very far, with many claws, which has the design of entering into Libanus” (Ez 17:3 LXX).

As **Origen** says, the description of the eagle therein, differs from any other eagle, as far as its great size, huge wings, and powerful claws. It is also destined to come to Lebanon; to crop off selected cedar branches, and to carry them to the land of Canaan, the land of trade, surrounded by walls... It carries the branches outside, to plant them in a field by running (abundant) water¹.

The Lord clarified that that eagle is the king of Babylon (Ez 17:11); whose wings are great, and its claws are numerous - a symbol of the power of his weapons and the enormity of his army². The dense feathers of various colors, refer to the several kingdoms that were under his authority. This king put in his heart to take over Lebanon that refers to the kingdom of Judah.

Origen says about Nebuchadnezzar: [He was the eagle, with the great size and the large claws; who dared to proclaim: “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; Also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasuries. So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. My

¹ In Ezek. hom. 11:1.

² St. Chrysostom : Conc. Statues 19 :9.

hand has found like a nest the riches of the people. And as one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth” (Is 10 13, 14). This great eagle had no authority to enter Lebanon... Yet, as they sinned against the Lord, this eagle came to uproot them. He cropped off all the branches of that tree, and carried them to Canaan, (said to be the land of the cursed) as Noah said: “Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren” (Gen 9:25).]

It was in about the year 597 B C, that Nebuchadnezzar entered the holy city, the capital of Judah (symbolically Lebanon), after a siege that lasted 18 months. What did the king do?

a- He took the highest branch of the cedar (Ez 17:3); or, according to the Septuagint version, the choice branches of cedar. If the cedar tree here refers to the royal house of David; its highest elect branch would be King Jehoiachin together with his family, who were carried to Babylon.

b- He cropped off its topmost young twigs (Ez 17:4), and carried them to the land of traders; referring to cropping off the elect young people of high abilities, the children of priests and the aristocrats, gathering them together in his net, and carrying them to Babylon. There, giving them complete freedom to work, they carried out vast commercial enterprises during their captivity.

c- He took some of the seed of the land, planted them in a fertile field, by abundant waters; to grow and become like a willow tree (Ez 17:5); under whose shade many took refuge. Although it grew and became a spreading vine, yet of low stature. Its branches turned toward the eagle to embrace him; but its roots were under him (Ez 17:6).

What are those seeds but king Zedekiah, nephew of Jehoiachin, whom Nebuchadnezzar set a king on Judah in place of his uncle Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy neither the city nor the Temple, but only took away some of the young men and the utensils of the house of the Lord. He left Zedekiah to take care of the fertile field by the abundant waters, and of his people, after making a covenant with him, in which the king gave an oath of loyalty. Actually the seeds started to grow to become a spreading vine, although of low stature, having been under the authority of the king of Babylon. Its branches turned to embrace the eagle; namely it entered into a covenant with him; but its roots were under him, a sign of his authority on them.

It is short-stemmed; and as **Origen** says: [It was not possible to be otherwise; having been planted in Babylon; how could it maintain its old strength, having turned into a Babylonian vine?! The great eagle moved it, as it produced no fruits in the holy city. There it settles down in Canaan, to become fragile and short-stemmed. In the holy land, it has been a great vine; yet, being moved to the land of sinners, it became weak and fragile. And now, O vine that hear my words! If you want to be great, do not go outside the boundaries of the Church. Settle down in the holy land, in Jerusalem; lest, because of your sins, you would become in a bad state. You would be moved to another land; and become a weak and fragile vine. Your fruits would fall, and your roots would dry up; to make you yearn for comfort close to the other eagle¹.]

[Those who have been princes in the Church, because of their sin, they were moved from the summit of Lebanon, and were carried away to Babylon... Let us pray, that no one would be moved from Jerusalem to Canaan, and that we would not be deviated away from His will, lest the branch would be corrupted, and both the fruits and the roots would dry up. The plant of Jerusalem would not be able to produce fruits or seeds on a strange land, but would dry up, unless it abides in the will of God, and in His Church, namely in His works and commandments, and in the comprehension of the true nature of the Lord Jesus Christ².]

The other eagle is the Pharaoh of Egypt; the one with great wings, a sign of the might of his army; and with dense feathers (*with many claws LXX*), a sign of its great number. Yet, not of various colors; as, unlike Babylon, he did not have authority on several nations - He, toward whom the vine turned with its roots and branches to seek watering to grow (*LXX*). This vine refers to king Zedekiah, who, together with the majority of his people, sought the help of the Pharaoh of Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar, betraying the covenant, and breaking the oath as he thought of rebelling against the king of Babylon. Here, the prophet Ezekiel warned the king against two mistakes: The first is breaking his oath, even though it was with a pagan king; and the second is leaning upon a human arm (the Pharaoh of Egypt), instead of repenting and returning to God with all his heart. He proclaimed that the destiny of Zedekiah would be like his two predecessors, 'Jehoahaz,' who

¹ In Ezek. hom. 11:4.

² In Ezek. hom. 11:4.

was taken captive to Egypt, 607 B C (Ez 19:4)); and Jehoiachin who was taken captive to Babylon (Ez 19:9).

As king Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, he sent his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and many people (Ez 17:15); God asked him. *“Will you prosper?”* to be instantly followed by the answer: *“Will he not pull up its roots, Cuts off its fruit, and leave it to wither? All of its spring leaves will wither, and no great power or many people will be needed to pluck it up by its roots. Behold, it is planted, Will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind touches it? It will wither in the garden terrace where it grew”* (Ez 17:9, 10). So He confirms more than once that the vine would dry up, roots, fruits, branches, and leaves; dry up completely on all levels!

Origen wonders why both Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh were called ‘eagle’ - a hateful kind of bird (Lev 11:13); when the righteous and the good people, are called by the same name. In the proverbs it came: *“Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle”* (Prov 23:4, 5). (A righteous man will get rich, not through his wisdom; but he would make for himself two wings of an eagle: faith and work; namely, the love of God and the love of men; by which he would fly up to heaven, to settle down, by God’s grace, in the divine bosom). It is also said: *“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles; They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint”* (Is 40:31).

Origen says: [If the eagle is hated and cursed, it would not be fitting for us, as righteous men, to acquire wings like his wings. And when the wealth of the rich increase, they should not make for themselves wings like those of eagles¹.] Why then, was the eagle used as analogous to the righteous? He gives the answer, saying:

[In the Holy Scripture there are names of certain animals that are considered both good and evil at the same time...

For example the lion has two sides: A good side: *“Judah is a lion’s whelp. From a prey my son, you have gone up; He lies down as a lion, who shall rouse him?”* (Gen 49:9). And an evil side: *“Your*

¹ In Ezek. hom. 11:3.

adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8, 9). Moreover, that crafty and deceptive enemy, wishing for our fall, "*He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; He lies in wait to catch the poor*" (Ps 10:9). Therefore, as the lion could be considered either good or evil, so is the eagle...

The righteous is not an eagle, but like an eagle, and competing with it.

Likewise, the 'bronze serpent' (Num 21:8) was a symbol for the Savior; having been, not a true serpent, but an image of it. It refers to the Savior: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*" (John 3:14)... And in another situation, a righteous man is commanded to be wise like a serpent (Mat 11:16); not to become himself a serpent. That is of course to avoid being as deceptive as the real serpent...

Both the eagle and the lion are among the clean animals; as we find the cherubim, "*Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle*" (Ez 1:10)... They are clean; as nothing unclean would be in the presence of God.

Now you, O believer, you have become clean; and as said to the apostle Peter: "*What God has cleansed, you must not call unclean*" (Acts 10:15).

Thus the cleanliness of the lion and the eagle were thus proclaimed, having appeared with the cherubim. Moreover prophesying the advent of the Lord Christ, the prophet Isaiah says, "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat... And the lion shall eat straw like the ox*" (Is 11:6). This will be realized by the faith in Christ, when the different natures come together. The lion, forgetting its ferocity, is no longer hateful. And all beasts, that were said to be hateful according to God's statutes, will once more receive their original nature, that was at the beginning of creation. This transformation has already begun; and will be realized on the second advent...

Therefore, do not marvel that both Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh were said to be like eagles¹.]

¹ In Ezek. hom. 11:3.

2- THE INTERPRETATION OF THE RIDDLE

God did not leave the riddle vague, but presented to the rebellious house its interpretation, so as to give them no excuse to hasten to lean upon the Pharaoh of Egypt and his armies. In His interpretation, He concentrates on the seriousness of breaking the convention, and despising the oath, even though it is with a pagan king; that which made the Lord Himself intervene to chasten them through defeat. He confirms that desolation will not occur by human power, but God Himself will chasten them: *“Will he who does such things escape? Can he break a covenant and still be delivered? ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘Surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke - with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Nor will Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company do anything in the war, when they heap up a siege mound and build a wall to cut off many persons. Since he despised the oath by breaking the covenant and in fact gave his hand and still did all these things, he shall not escape.’ Therefore thus says the Lord; ‘As I live, Surely My oath which he despised, and My covenant which he broke, I will recompense on his own head. I will spread My net over him, and he shall be taken in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon and try him there for the treason which he committed against Me. All his fugitives with all his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered to every wind; And you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken”* (Ez 17:15-21).

God considers the oath as His own, and despising it as an insult to Him personally. Pharaoh with all his armies, will not be able to deliver him from the hand of God, not just from that of Nebuchadnezzar. Who catches him in his net is the Lord. He will carry him to Babylon, there to die, for his betrayal of the covenant. He will fall, together with his counselors and army by the sword; and the rest of his people will be captivated, and scattered in every wind.

That is why the Lord Christ warned us against swearing altogether; saying: *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, ‘Do not swear at all; neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because*

you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one'" (Mat 5:33-37).

St. John Chrysostom often warned against using oath. Of his words: [I am ready today, not to demonstrate, just the destruction of one house, or two, or even three, because of an oath, but of a whole city and a people beloved by God, who always used to enjoy the divine care, and a race that was delivered from many dangers - of Jerusalem itself, the city of God, that embraced the holy Temple and all the divine service; where there were the prophets, the grace of the Spirit, the ark of the covenant, the two tablets, and the golden vessel; that which angels often visited... She perished because of an oath¹.]

[It is not the oath that makes man trustworthy, but the testimony of his life, his straightforward words, and his good reputation. There are many who utter loud oaths, yet convince no one of their honesty; while others, when they just proclaim their acceptance of something, would be believed more than those who use many oaths².]

[Indeed, the troubles of giving an oath are great... Realizing that, we should avoid it; Let our mouth be always trained on saying 'believe me;' to turn this into a fountain of every pious behavior; as the tongue that is trained to use only this expression, would be shy and ashamed to utter any evil word³.]

[When we completely refrain from swearing, we close the entrance before the devil altogether. While if we utter just one oath, we give him the chance to cause us troubles without limits⁴.]

St. John Chrysostom not only demands from us to refrain from swearing, but not to ask others to swear; saying: [When in doubt about certain financial affairs, do not kill your brother's soul by asking him to swear! If you believe that he is honest, you do not need to ask him to swear. And if you know for sure that he is a liar, do not push him to swear falsely⁵.]

¹ *Conc. Statues, 19 :8.*

² *Conc. Statues, 7:10.*

³ *Conc. Statues, 8 :6.*

⁴ *Conc. Statues, 14 :5.*

⁵ *Conc. Statues, 15 :15.*

3- A PROMISE OF A NEW KINGDOM

If entering into a covenant with the king of Babylon had helped Judah for a certain time; to become like a willow tree, and a spreading vine, though of low stature (Ez 17:5, 6), and if resorting to the Pharaoh of Egypt ended in its complete destruction; therefore, there is no salvation for man by a human arm. It is imperative that God Himself intervenes and plants His vine by His own hands; plants it in Him - the haughty high Mountain near which the enemy cannot approach. *“Thus says the Lord God, ‘I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on a high and prominent mountain”* (Ez 17:22). He takes a branch of the house of David (the cedar); from which the Lord Christ, the Son of David, incarnates, and plants the Church in it! He is the topmost of the young twigs; that is planted, not by a human arm, nor from human seed; but He is the Word of God, born before all ages, incarnated on the Mountain height of Israel; who appears as a fruitful bough, and becomes a majestic cedar, under which believers of all colors, of every tribe and nation, will dwell; will fly to Him by the Holy Spirit; and in the shadows of its branches they will settle down (Ez 17:23).

Thus, amid all those dark prophecies, and harsh chastisements, the Lord will shine on them with hope of salvation by a divine arm through the Messiah, the true King, from the seed of David, who embraces in His body, members from all nations!

God who allowed for them to be chastened by the two eagles: the king of Babylon and the Pharaoh of Egypt; will carry them as though by the wings of an eagle, not just to bring them over to the Promised Land, but to carry humanity of all nations to the bosom of God the Father, in the higher Jerusalem, where eagles cannot snatch!

CARRY ME AS THOUGH ON THE WINGS OF AN EAGLE

In the old days, You carried Your people away from the bondage of Pharaoh;
As though on the wings of an eagle;
You brought them to You;
And brought them into the Promised Land!

Yet, as they forsook You, they became the prey of eagles!
Were carried away by Nebuchadnezzar,
As an eagle he devoured them;
When they resorted to the Pharaoh of Egypt;
As an eagle he snatched them!
Now, You came to our world;
To have all mankind believe in You;
To carry them as though on the wings of an eagle,
Into the bosom of Your Father!

O, My God... How much I need You!
My sins have aroused the eagles over me!
When I fled away from Your hand,
I became a cheap prey.
Come, You, amazing in Your love;
Carry me in You.
Hide me, and cover me!
Give me the wings of a dove,
To fly to heaven!
Grant me Your Holy Spirit, to work in it!
To carry me into the bosom of Your Father, O Holy One!
How much I long for You, O the Rock of my soul!

CHAPTER 18

THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

In chapter 14, God dealt with the personal responsibility of man for the transgressions he commits, or the righteousness he performs. The iniquity of a false prophet will be on him; and every individual of the congregation, who inquires of a false prophet, or commits a transgression, will carry his own iniquity. And God confirmed, that when he punishes a city for its evil; even if there were 'Noah, Daniel, and Job' in it, they would only save themselves; not the people, nor even their own sons and daughters. Here also, confirming the extent of commitment of every man for what he does, disregarding the present or past behavior of his parents; He presents the following examples:

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- Personal responsibility | 1-9. |
| 2- A wicked son of a righteous father | 10-13. |
| 3- A righteous son of a wicked father | 14-20. |
| 4- When man turns from his ways | 21-32. |

1- PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

In this chapter God deals with the proverb that was common among the people of Israel: "*The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge*" (Ez 18:2). They assumed that what comes on them of God's wrath, was but a fruit of the evil ways of their fathers, who brought the pagan worship into the divine sanctuaries. But God intends to confirm to them that He would never let man pay for his parents' sins; and that the chastisements He allows, are for the sake of what people are doing at that time.

We have previously dealt with this topic in our interpretation of the book of Exodus; in which God says: "*For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me*" (Exod 20:5). We said that God does not mean by that, that He let one generation bears the iniquities of previous generations; but, with His love, He extends His long-suffering over one and two generations, with the hope that they may repent. But if they do not, He will let even the third and the fourth generations bear the chastisement, on account of the fact that they did not turn away from the ways of their fathers; whom he calls, "*those who*

hate me.” But if they repent and do turn from their fathers’ ways, they would not be counted anymore as children of the wicked, but God Himself will be their Father, to enjoy His grace.

❖ The soul that does not abide in God, is the source of her iniquities; so it transgresses; and the soul that transgresses, will itself die¹.

St. Ambrose

God is impartial; the soul of the father is like that of the son; or as He says: “*All souls are Mine. The soul of the father, as well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die*”(Ez 18:4). Here we wonder:

(1) Will man inherit some of his father’s weaknesses?

(2) Does a soul die?

(1) Will man inherit some of his father’s weaknesses? The Holy Bible does not disregard the influence of parents on man’s life. He who is born in a holy home, and is raised by pious parents, will find the possibility that helps his spiritual life to grow, and his soul to set forth toward God. On the contrary, in case of wicked father and mother; even if they do not encourage their son to practice sin and evil, they would in the least stand in the way of his spiritual growth. However, many children loved evil, despite the piety of their parents; like for example the two sons of Eli the priest; and likewise, many children loved righteousness despite the wickedness of their fathers. The circumstances under which man live, may be good or bad, but it would not commit him to follow either of them. Man himself, may start his life in wickedness, then would turn to mend his ways with God. And, the other way round, he may start his life in the Spirit, then would turn to fall in evil, and to live in sin. That is why this chapter presents us with four examples: A wicked son to a righteous father; a righteous son to a wicked father; a righteous who diverted from his ways; and the other way round. This actually happened with the kings of Judah: Hezekiah the good king, has been a dedicated minister, who was right in the sight of God, according to all that his father David had done (2 Chr 29:2). He started his reign by repairing and purifying the Temple, and he also wiped out the high places and destroyed the wooden images. As to his father Ahaz, who was fond of the idols from the start of his reign, he made his son pass

¹ *Isaac or the Soul 7:61*

through the fire, and sacrificed and burned incense on the high places (2 Kings 16:3, 4). He even shut down the gates of the Temple court, put off the lamps, and did not burn incense nor offered sacrifices to the living God. Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, made his people go astray away from the truth, let them sacrifice for all the hosts of heaven, and do more than the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel (2 Kings 21:2-9); although in his last days, he put right much of the wrong he had previously done (2 Kings 33:1-20).

(2) **Does the soul die?** St. Jerome¹ discerns between the saying of the Psalmist: “*What man can live and not see death?*” (Psalm 89:48); and what came in Ezekiel: “*The soul who sins shall die*” (Ez 18:4); saying that there is a difference between ‘*seeing death*’ and ‘*tasting it.*’ [Whoever sees death, may not taste it; whereas whoever tastes death, has definitely seen it.] By this he means that all mankind see death, death of the body. But whoever has his soul sanctified in the Lord, would see the death of his body, but does not taste death; as he is bearing the power of the resurrection of Christ, working in him.

- ❖ As there is death for the body, there is also death for the soul... However the death of the soul is not like that of the body; It is more horrible. Death of the body is the separation of the soul from the body; by which man is set free of worries and troubles; and the soul is transferred somewhere else. Then, as the body falls apart and deteriorates, will, once more get together anew from corruption, and will again receive his old soul. This is the death of the body; whereas the death of the soul is horrible and fearsome; in which, with the corruption of the body, the soul will have the same end, but will once more reunite with the body, will not perish but will be cast together with it in the everlasting fire².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ This death (of the soul) will have its opponent and enemy, He who says: “*I am the Life*” (John 14:6)³.

Origen

- ❖ According to the Holy Bibles, we are taught that there are three kinds of death: A death like that when we die to sin and live to God.

¹ *In Ps., hom. 80.*

² *In Eph. hom 18.*

³ *Comm. In Matt. 13:9.*

Blessed is this death, by which we escape from sin and be dedicated to God. He who separates us from everything corruptible, and sanctifies us to Him who is incorruptible.

The second kind is the departure from this life; like that which Abraham and David went through, and were buried with their fathers; as the soul is set free from the bonds of the body.

And the third kind of death, is that about which it is said: "*Let the dead bury their own dead*" (Mat 8:22); by which, it is not only the body that dies, but also the soul; as "*The soul who sins shall die*" (Ez 18:4). It shall die away from the Lord, not through natural weakness, but through that of sinning. This death is not a departure from this life, but a fall in sin.

Therefore the spiritual death is different from the natural death; and the third kind is death as punishment¹.

St. Ambrose

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that the words that came in this chapter (v. 4-9), [include a description of the behavior of Christians; in which God provokes us to adopt the blessed life, that is the reward of the life of goodness - the eternal life².] This description embraces both the positive and the negative sides in the believer's life:

a- It is fitting for a Christian to walk in righteousness; to do "*what is lawful and right*" (Ez 18:5); to refrain from eating on the mountains that are defiled by pagan sacrifices; and from lifting his eyes up to their idols. By that he would be completely sanctified; sanctified in his heart by righteousness, truth, and justice; sanctified in his food, by refraining from partaking of the pagan feasts; and even sanctified in the looks of his eyes, by not lifting them up to their idols; sanctified positively, by doing righteousness, and by love of truth and justice; and negatively, by refraining from everything evil.

b- A Christian would never defile his neighbor's wife; would never come near his own unclean wife; would love holiness in his inner life, in his body, and those of others; and would never covet his neighbor's wife.

c- He would not practice oppression against anyone; not just by giving others their lawful rights; but by giving the poor his right in

¹ *On the Belief in the Resurr.* 2:36, 37.

² *Instructor* 1:10.

partaking of his needs; giving the naked his right in partaking of his clothes; and offering those in debt to him their right in love and mercy, by not asking them to pay interest; as well as presenting to others the right of support of the oppressed against the oppressor; not to stand negatively; but “*execute true judgment between man and man*”(Ez 18:8).

d- The source of his righteous life, would be his obedience to the divine commandment. As the Lord says: “*If he has walked in My statutes, and kept My judgments faithfully - He is just. He shall surely live*” (Ez 18:9).

2- A WICKED SON OF A RIGHTEOUS FATHER

The first example presented by God, of the personal responsibility, is the wicked son of a righteous father; that: “*He shall not live, if he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die; His blood shall be upon him*”(Ez 18:13).

St. Jerome wrote to his disciple, the deacon Sabinianus, provoking him to repentance: [You probably boast that the bishop who ordained you is a saint; assuming that his worthiness would atone for your abominations. I previously told you that a father would not be punished for his son’s iniquities; nor a son for his father’s. “*A soul who sins shall die*¹.”]

3- A RIGHTEOUS SON OF A WICKED FATHER

The people, in the days of king Zedekiah, assumed that they are more righteous than those in the days of king Manasseh; thus they felt that they are bearing the iniquities of their fathers. But here, God confirms: “*If however, he begat a son who sees all the sins which his father has done; and considers but does not do likewise... He shall not die for the iniquity of his father; He shall surely live. As for his father, Because he cruelly oppressed, Robbed his brother by violence, And did what is not good among his people; Behold, he shall die for his iniquity*” (Ez 18:14-19).

As man commits a sin, he loses his life; According to **St. Gregory of Nyssa**, [Sin is a sojourn away from God, who is alone the

¹ Epist 147:10.

true Life¹.]

But some may ask, how can a righteous son not bear the iniquity of his father, when it is written, “*Let the inquiry of his fathers be remembered before the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out*” (Ps 109:14). **St. Augustine** answers this question; saying: [Should we understand that man bears the iniquities of his fathers? Those who convert in Christ, would not bear the iniquities of their fathers; as they are no longer children of the wicked; having not followed their lead. That is why the following words are added: “*I shall visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children... of those who hate Me*” (Exod 20:5); namely those who hate me like their fathers did².]

4- WHEN MAN TURNS FROM HIS SINS

We said that God intends by His words here, to provoke His people toward repentance; by not worrying about the sins of their fathers; and even about their own sins, past and present, if they present true repentance; saying: “*If a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all my statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die*” (Ez 18:21). This statement is considered by some scholars, as the center of all the book; the most precious; It is a strong invitation to repentance: “*‘Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?,’ says the Lord God, ‘and not that he should turn from his ways and live?’*” (Ez 18:23). It opens wide the door to hope; so that not one single soul should perish by the spirit of despair.

The Fathers of the Church find in this chapter, a fertile field into which every fallen and desperate enters to feed on the fruit of repentance, to get filled with hope; and that it presents as well obvious warnings to the steadfast souls, lest, by slothfulness, they would lose all their past labor. The following are some of their comments:

- ❖ Encouragement, would lessen the burden of sins and lusts; bringing hope of salvation³.

St. Clement of Alexandra

- ❖ For the sake of those who are in danger of despair, He offered the

¹ *Adv. Eunomius 2: 13.*

² *On Ps. 109.*

³ *Instructor 1:10.*

refuge of forgiveness; and for the sake of those in danger of slothfulness; through resorting to postponing, He made the date of death not sure¹.

- ❖ If they listen to this voice, and believe in it, they would be cured from despair, and would be saved from that bottomless pit in which they fall².
- ❖ We should not give up hope in anyone, as long as God's long-suffering leads the wicked to repentance; We should not expel him from this life³.
- ❖ Do not despair of salvation. Remember what is written in the Holy Bible, that, "*Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return?* (Jer 8:4). The wounded will be healed. He, who would fell a prey to the wild beasts will get away; and he, who would confess his sins will not be despised... It is time for bearing and long-suffering, for healing and correction. Did you stumble? Get up! Did you trespass? Do not do it any more!⁴

St. Augustine

- ❖ Repentance is 'life,' which is better than death... Hasten to it, O sinner! Embrace it, like when one drowning would holdfast even to some board to help him float among the waves of sins; and to carry him to the divine port full of compassion⁵.

Tertullian

- ❖ As long as what God says is true. That if I repent He will forgive all my past sins and all my transgressions, why do you frighten me? When God promises me forgiveness; will you let me fall into despair?⁶

Fr. Caesarius, Bishop of Arles

While He strongly opens the doors of hope before sinners to repent, He, at the same time, warns those standing fast lest they fall; saying: "*But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness*

¹ *In Joan. tract. 33:8.*

² *Sermons on N.T. Lessons 37:10.*

³ *ibid 21:21.*

⁴ *Ep, to a lapsed monk 44:2.*

⁵ *On Repentance 4.*

⁶ *Sermon 18:2.*

and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, Shall he live? All the righteousness, which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, Because of them he shall die” (Ez 18:24).

And as said by **St. Anthony the Great**: [I wish we stand fast in our strife every day; knowing that if we get slothful for just one day, God will not forgive us for the sake of the past; but His wrath will come on us... Judas has lost all his previous strife because of one night¹.]

And **St. Basil the Great** says: [In case of a change, the labor of the righteous shall not help him, and the sinner will not be blamed; when the former divert from what is good to what is evil; and when the later turn from what is evil to what is better².]

Now, in case you consider that phrase as being harsh and cruel; listen to what **St. John Chrysostom** says: [God, even in this case, shows the greatness of His compassion. He presents to us those terrifying things, in order to set us up, and to awaken in us the desire for the Kingdom³.] And **St. Clement of Alexandria** says: [God’s punishments are for the sake of salvation, and His chastisement leads us to repentance; for God yearns for repentance more than for the sinner’s death⁴.]

❖ “*For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live” (Ez 18:32).* These words, God addresses to you if you are desperate: “*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.*” Even if you desire to die; I do not. You did not create yourself; but by despair you will perish.

Anyhow, God created you out of nothing; then sought you when you got lost; and found you through the blood of His Son, and saved you.

Now He is calling you: Turn from the pit of despair. Come to Me; for I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but for his return to live...

Do not lose confidence because of being in despair about your

¹ Vita S. Antoni 18.

² Ep. to Clilo his disciple 42:2.

³ In 2 Tim., hom 3.

⁴ Strom. 7:7.

sins; and at the same time, do not trust in the longevity of life; therefore repent... Why don't you repent today?!¹

Fr. Caesarius Bishop of Arles

Origen sees in this divine talk, concerning the possibility of the return of sinners to God, and the warning of those standing against falling, a confirmation of the falsehood of the opinion, of the existence of different attitudes created as such; clarifying that a sinner can become good, and the other way round².

YOU DID NOT CREATE ME TO DIE

You created me as a king, to live in the world in my royal palace!
You did not create me to die, but to live by and with You!

How amazing, O God, is Your love for me;
For even if I seek death, You desire my life!
I do not know what is right for my edification and glory!
But You know all what is for my life, O my Creator!

You do not wish for me to die, but to live.
Do not let me pay for my fathers' sins.
And do not hurt my feelings about the sins I have forsaken.
You are amazing in Your care for me!

You are the Savior of souls from corruption.
You alone can renew my nature, O My Savior!

¹ *Sermon 18:4.*

² *In Matt. 2:11.*

CHAPTER 19

LAMENTATION FOR THE KINGS

The previous chapters revealed the sins and iniquities of the people; and now God exposes the evils of their kings.

1- The lioness and her two cubs 1-9.

2- The vine plucked up 10-14.

1- THE LIONESS AND HER TWO CUBS

Here, God presents a lamentation for the kings of Judah, especially the two kings: Jehoahaz, who met his sad destiny by his captivation to Egypt, in the year 608 B.C., after a reign that lasted only 3 months; and Jehoiachin, who was captivated to Babylon, also after three months reign (2 Kings 24).

In this lamentation we notice:

a- He does not say ‘Lamentation for the princes of Judah’ or for ‘Kings of Judah,’ but said, ‘Lamentation for the ‘Princes of Israel,’ for what occurs to one of the two kingdoms, would affect the whole people. God looks at the believing humanity as one people; *“If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it”* (1 Cor 12:26). Those two kings did wrong, not only to themselves by their bad practices, nor to the kingdom of Judah alone, but to all Israel, that was at that time, considered as God’s people. When one member of the body gets weak, it would cause the whole body to weaken with it; and for the repentance of one member, all heaven would rejoice! Our worship is a personal relationship with God; yet it is not an individual relationship, isolated from the holy congregation - the striving, the victorious; and even the members coming in the future. It is one Church, interacting together with love and the spirit of unity.

b- *“What is your mother? A lioness, she lay down among the lions; among the young lions she nourished her cubs”* (Ez 19:2). She is a queen who strongly lies down among the kings. Describing her as a lioness rather than a lion, is because she gives birth to kings and raises them. *“She brought up one of her cubs, and he became a young lion. He learned to catch prey, and he devoured men. The nations also heard of him. He was trapped in their pit; and they brought him with chains to*

the land of Egypt” (Ez 19:3, 4). He is Jehoahaz, who was raised in a royal household, became a king and learned to fight. Yet, instead of fighting to protect his people, he fought his own subjects to devour them. He worked on his own account, not on account of the kingdom that raised him, and made him a king; He proved that he was weak, deprived of ethical principles. He was captivated by Pharaoh ‘Necho,’ and was taken to Egypt, never to return to his land.

Anyhow, he has been a cub, who protected neither his people nor even himself; but devoured his subjects.

How drastic it is for a shepherd to turn into a wolf. Instead of protecting his sheep, he slays them to fulfill himself! He should have offered his life as a sacrifice of love for his people, and not slay his people for the sake of his own dignity or personal benefit. Concerning this, **St. Aphrahat** says: [Follow the example of our sweet Shepherd (Jesus), whose life was not dearer to Him than that of His sheep. Educate the young; Love the little sheep, carry them in your bosoms; so that, when you stand before the great Shepherd, you present to Him a complete herd; to be granted what He promised: “*Wherever I go, there you will also be.*”¹]

St. Augustine says:

[I wish we do not love ourselves, but love Him; and by caring for His sheep, we seek what is His, and not what is ours... As he, who lives by himself, will surely die if he loves himself (as such); and in this case he does not (truly) love himself; as by (thus) loving himself he loses his own life...

I wish the shepherds of the flock would not love themselves; would not consider the flock as a personal property, and not being that of Christ.

I wish they would not seek material gain; being wealth lovers;
Or abuse their people, being benefit seekers;
Or arrogantly seek glory from the dignity they get;
Or fall into heresies, as blasphemers.
Or despise the saintly fathers, as rebel children;
Or pay back good with evil, to those who intend to mend their ways; so as not to perish, as deniers of good deeds;

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي ، 1965 ، ص 466.

Or Kill their own selves and others with no mercy;
Or tend to defame the persons of saints, as false witnesses;
Or set free their lowly lusts, as unclean;
Or continuously complain... as merciless;
And know nothing about the ministry of love, as
uncompassionate;
Or stubbornly disturb humanity by their idiot discussions;
Not understanding what they are saying, or are defending, as
blind;
Who prefer carnal pleasures; being self-seekers and not seek for
God.

All these and other similar evils; either they are all manifested in one individual; or one of them does in a certain person, and another in somebody else; They are manifested some way or another, because of self-love. This evil that should be avoided by those who shepherd the flock of Christ; to seek what is Christ's and not what is their own; and not to use those for whose sake Christ shed His blood, to realize their own benefit¹.]

Jehoahaz devoured his own flock instead of protecting them, and giving his life for their sake; to become himself the prey of the Gentiles; fell into their snares; and carried in captivity to Egypt. Whoever cares for himself at the expense of his brothers, and the expense of his own salvation, would lose even his own carnal pleasure and earthly dignity.

The same situation happened to another king, Jehoiachin; who was no better than his predecessor; but devoured his people, and destroyed their cities by his evil practices; to turn the land desolate, before being taken captive to Babylon.

2- THE VINE, PLUCKED UP

After giving a lamentation for those two kings, He started to give another for the people of God; who were like a vine, planted by the waters of the divine grace; "*fruitful and full of branches because of many waters*" (Ez 19:11). Nations could not stand before it, but "*towered in stature above the thick branches...*" But, having forsaken its God, and gone back to idolatry, it was plucked up, and carried away to Babylon, to dry up by the winds of chastisement, and to lose its branches

¹ المرجع السابق، ص 503 ، 504.

through its increasing iniquities... Its branches became fuel, and it entered into a condition of intense weakness, with no one to support it! This is a lamentation for everyone who forsakes the ways of God, and goes after the pleasures of his heart, and the lusts of his body, to end up, denied of the enjoyment of the waters of the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver, and the Giver of fruits; and moved from the position of sonhood to God, to turn, through his evil heart and bad life, in the land of the enemy (the devil); into a stranger and a captive; to have his branches broken, to become fuel for fire; and his soul to dry up completely as a desolate land.

GIVE ME BACK MY ROYALTY

The kings of Israel turned from shepherds into wolves!
They devoured their sheep; and practiced the love of power!
They sought what is theirs, and not what are their people.
They perished, and lost every wealth, pleasure, and dignity!

I make a complaint of myself before You!
I forgot my royalty, and turned to devouring;
I did not seek love for others, but what is for myself!
Give me back my royal nature, O King of Kings!
Teach me how love should be, to become a queen!

CHAPTER 20

THEIR CONTINUOUS REBELLION

Having presented a lamentation for the kings, then for Israel itself, being the vine He cared for; that was plucked up and moved to a strange land for the sake of chastisement; He presents here a quick portrait of the continuous rebellion of the people along their history, despite the unfailing goodness of God.

1- An admonishment to the elders of Israel	1-4.
2- Their rebellion in Egypt	5-9.
3- Their rebellion in the wilderness	10-17.
4- The rebellion of the new generation in the wilderness	18-26.
5- Their rebellion on their entrance into Canaan	27-29.
6- Their rebellion in the days of Ezekiel	30-32.
7- Their rebellion in the land of captivity	33-39.
8- Return and Reform	40-44.
9- The destructive sword of Nebuchadnezzar	45-48.

It is a historical review of God's dealings with man. He grants him every care and love; while man pays Him back by rebellion and mutiny. This is the nature of man after falling. He does not see God as a friend, but as a commander; that is why he gives Him the back and not the face, and is unable to keep His commandments.

1- ADMONISHMENT TO THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL

In the previous year, it came to pass that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before the prophet Ezekiel in the land of captivity, concerning what would happen to the kingdom of Judah and to the people in captivity in those days. The Lord's response was however, directed toward repentance; saying: "*As I live I will not be inquired by you*" (Ez 20:3). If you have come to inquire of Me, You have first to rid yourselves of the rebellious nature, in which your fathers lived, and in which you now live; then I shall listen to you.

We often cry out to the Lord in the time of affliction; although He wishes to rescue and yearns to save; yet He wants the affliction to realize its goal; namely, that we repent and return to Him from all the heart! If God delays in responding, it is not out of lack of caring, but is rather a sign of caring; as He waits for our true repentance, in order to

benefit from the temptation. Our rebellious nature is in need of the fire of affliction, in order to return to the Lord our God, and to seek him fervently.

2- THEIR REBELLION IN EGYPT

The nature of rebellion is not something new in their life, but has stuck to them since they appeared as a people or a nation in the land of Egypt. Jacob and his children came to Egypt as a family, and departed from it as a people under the leadership of Moses, their first leader. In Egypt, where that people and nation were planted, the idols of Egypt grew in their hearts. God revealed the secret of bondage of the children of Israel in the land of Egypt. It did not lie in the ferocity of Pharaoh's heart, but rather in the diversion of the heart of those people; saying to them: *"Each of you throw away the abominations which are before his eyes; and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against Me"* (Ez 20:7, 8). While God was searching out for them the land that flows with milk and honey-'the glory of all lands' (Ez 20:6), they refused to cast away the abominations, which were before their eyes, and to forsake the idols. However, He did not pour His wrath on them in the midst of the land of Egypt. He mightily brought them out, for the sake of His holy name (Ez 20:9); to be glorified in them among the Gentiles.

So, God cared for man since his creation. He arranged for our salvation, and for our crossover from the bondage of sin; to bring us into His bosom - the true Paradise that flows for the soul, with milk and honey; while man is born with the germ of rebellion flowing in his blood. Since rebelliousness is a nature we inherited after the rebellion of our first parents; our reform needs an overall change of our nature.

3- THEIR REBELLION IN THE WILDERNESS

How numerous were God's gifts in the wilderness! He granted them free and fresh food every day. They did not need to plow the land, to plant or to reap the crop, or even to prepare their meals. He gave them a rock that flowed with sweet water that followed them wherever they went; something very costly in the desert! They did not need new clothes, sandals, or medicine to treat the sick. He cared for every single thing, big or small. Despite that, in His admonishment to them, He did not mention any of this, but concentrated on two issues, that He considered as the best of His gifts to them. The divine commandment

and His Sabbaths; saying: *“I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them. Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them”* (Ez 20:12). He gave them the commandment as His statutes and judgments; and the Sabbaths as being His Sabbaths. By the commandment a man lives; and by the Sabbaths he is sanctified. According to God’s opinion, that is the climax of what He has done for them in the wilderness.

As to the commandment, it is a sign of God’s love and care for man. He did not make him the way He made the irrational beings that live according to what the nature given to them by God, dictates. But gave him the free will, and granted him the commandment as a sign of this freedom; he is free to accept life with God, or to reject it. And as **Tertullian** says: [He made him as a human being, to boast that he is the only creature to be found worthy of receiving the divine commandment; being knowledgeable and rational; capable of calmly controlling himself by the bonds of rational freedom; of submitting to God, to whom everything submits¹.]

The commandment likewise is the medium, in which man surrenders his will to the Lord in submission; to receive the divine will working in him. Accepting the commandment, he accepts the word of God working in him. That is why the Lord says: *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:33, 34); and, *“The word that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). **St. Mark the Hermit** says: [God hides in His commandments; Whoever seeks Him will find Him in them².]

As to the Sabbaths that God gave to sanctify us, they refer to the Lord Christ Himself, who came on the seventh day, as the Mystery of our true rest; as the word ‘Sabbath’ means in Hebrew, “rest.” There is no rest for us except in Jesus Christ. He is the Mystery of the Sabbath. In Him, God the Father found rest in us; having found Him as our representative, the subject of His pleasure. And in Him we also found rest in God the Father; finding in Him, the bosom of God the Father

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، 1967، ص 95.

² المرجع السابق، ص 93.

receiving us. The Lord Christ is the Mystery of our Sabbath, and the Mystery of our sanctification.

St. Augustine divides the world's history of salvation, according to days of the week:

- The first day: From Adam until the great flood.
- The second day: From the great flood until Abraham.
- The third day: From Abraham until David.
- The fourth day: From David until the captivity.
- The fifth day: From the captivity until the incarnation of Christ.
- The sixth day: From the incarnation until the great day of the Lord.
- The seventh day: This is the great day of the Lord, in which humanity will find its rest in our Lord Jesus Christ. By that, the Lord brings us into a life with no end, in which both our souls and bodies find rest. [There, we find rest and see... we see and love... we love and praise.... That is how it will be in the end with no end... As what goal shall we seek for our souls, other than to reach that Kingdom with no end?!¹]

St. Clement of Alexandria says: [We holdfast to the spiritual Sabbath, until the coming of the Savior; having found rest from sin².]

God presented His commandment as a sign of His appreciation of man, more than of any other earthly creation; but man despised it, and did not abide to it. And God presented to him His Sabbaths for the sake of his sanctification; but man greatly defiled the Lord's Sabbaths (Ez 20:13). Despite that, the Lord God says: "*Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness*" (Ez 20:17). This is God's long-suffering toward us, and His love for us!

4- THE REBELLION OF THE NEW GENERATION IN THE WILDERNESS

Again God confirmed to the new generation, who were born in the wilderness, that they should not walk by the spirit of their fathers, who came out from the land of Egypt, carrying its idols in their hearts. But they should walk in God's statutes, keep His judgments, and do them; hallow His Sabbaths; that will be a sign between Him and them. However the children were not less rebellious than their fathers. they

¹ St. Augustine: *City of God*, 22 :30.

² للمؤلف: المسيح في سرّ الإفخارستيا، 1973، ص 125.

were attracted to the idols of their fathers, and not to the Lord their God. Despite all that, for His name's sake, He did not pour out His fury on them and fulfill His anger against them in the wilderness, so as not to let His name be profaned in the sight of the Gentiles.

Some people may probably object to the divine words: *“Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live; And I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate and that they might know that I am the Lord”* (Ez 20:25, 26).

Persisting on their rebellion, God presents to sinners His statutes, and shows them His judgments for the sake of their salvation (Ez 20:11); Yet He does not commit them to walk according to them. If they persist on their rebellion, *“God gives them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting”* (Rom 1:28).

The words *“I gave them up”* here means “I allowed them” to adopt the statutes and judgments related to pagan worship, as for example, causing their firstborn to pass through the fire etc.; in order to let them perish.

5- THEIR REBELLION ON THEIR ENTRANCE INTO CANAAN

Having extended their sojourn in the wilderness to 40 years, to let them forget the idols of Egypt that they carried in their heart, He brought them ultimately to a new land. Nevertheless they adopted the pagan worship of that land on the high places; and instead of acting as the sanctified people of God glorifying Him in the midst of the Gentiles, they followed their abominations.

6- THEIR REBELLION IN THE DAYS OF EZEKIEL

The act of rebellion was not a matter of old history, but it is a present day fact. It began by the appearance of that people as a nation; then followed them in the wilderness, until the new generation. then flared the more as they entered the land of promise; and remained working in them even on the day the prophet Ezekiel was talking to the elders of Israel. The Lord rebuked them saying: *“Are you defiling yourselves in the manner of your fathers, and committing harlotry according to their abominations? For when you offer your gifts and*

make your sons pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols, even to this day?!... As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you”(Ez 20:30, 31). He is not going to listen to their inquiry, nor respond to their requests, until they change their hearts. He will chasten them with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm; will pour out His fury over them; will scatter them, and will plead His case with them face to face (Ez 20:33 - 35).

7- THEIR REBELLION IN THE LAND OF CAPTIVITY

In all that, He does not act for the sake of revenge; but for chastisement, in order to bring them into a new covenant: “I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me” (Ez 20:37, 38). He brings them over to a wilderness, but not that of Sinai, as He did with their fathers, but to a condition of drought within their captivity; and will scatter them among the Gentiles, for the sake of their repentance under the rod.

8- RETURN AND REFORM

He portrayed the diversion of Israel toward idolatry, as being an ancient diversion, violent, and with deadly results. But despite that dark and evil past, yet, and in the same chapter, He shines on them with a future full of hope, of returning from captivity, and of their reform; as a symbol of man’s return from the captivity of sin, and of the reform of his corrupt nature. He brings us into His “*holy mountain,*” into His sanctuaries; the mountain heights; namely, to the Church of Christ, where we worship God in Jesus Christ; and where He will accept our offerings as a sweet aroma for His pleasure (Ez 20:41). This salvation is not because of our own worthiness; but through free grace; saying: “*Not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel,*’ says the Lord God” (Ez 20:44).

9- THE DESTRUCTIVE SWORD OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Although He shone on them with hope of their return and their reform; yet He confirms that chastisement is imperative; first by the destructive and fiery sword of Nebuchadnezzar. It started by a supernatural fire in the southern region; a fire of bitter chastisement, to consume all thorns of sin. It starts from the south; as a reference to the kingdom of the south (Judah and Jerusalem).

The prophet set his face toward the south (Ez 20:46, 47); namely, toward the land of Israel, to behold from afar the forests of Lebanon... He proclaimed: *“Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you; the blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be scorched by it”* (Ez 20:47). So God pours the fire of His judgment on them, to let them all realize His holiness and justice.

The prophet ends this chapter by saying: *“Ah, Lord God! They say of me, ‘Does he not speak parables?’”* (Ez 20:49). This is always the case of the slothful soul in its search for its Savior. it sees His talk as vague parables. as **St. Ambrose** says in his comment on the words of the ‘Song of songs’: *“By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him”* (Song 3:1): [She seeks him by night, because he speaks parables. He made the darkness His dwelling place; *“Day unto day utter speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge”* (Ps 19:2)... But she would not find Him that way¹.]

UPROOT MY REBELLION

You are all love, O my God, as for me, I am a rebel!
Who will save me from my denying nature, but You, O my Savior?!

The elders in the land of captivity inquired of You;
You did not answer them, because You wish for their repentance and their return to You.

In the talk of your prophet to them, I see my denying nature!
In the land of Egypt they rebelled against You;
Although they were brought out by a mighty hand, and a stretched arm;
Yet they carried the idols of the Egyptians in their hearts!
In the wilderness, You were amazing in Your care for them;
Yet they did not stop murmuring.

In the land of promise, You were their stronghold;
Yet they disobeyed Your statutes; and partook of idol worshipping!
You chastened them by captivity. And there, instead of repenting they got filled with abominations!

Now, how would You deal with them?!

You did not create in me the situations for rebellion;

¹ *Isaac, or the Soul, 5:39.*

But I, in the corruption of my heart, made every situation an excuse to
proclaim my rebellion!

Save me, O Lord, from my continuous rebellion!

Let me abide in You, to bear the fellowship of Your divine nature.

By partaking of the communion of Your given body and blood, I bear
the nature of self- giving love!

CHAPTER 21

THE SONG OF THE SWORD OF GOD

As the Lord proclaimed that He had forsaken the city (Jerusalem); and even confirmed that He will kindle it with fire; the Jews answered saying: “*Does he not speak parables?!*” (Ez 20:49) That is why, in this chapter, He speaks openly of that fire; namely, the chastising fiery sword:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- A prophesy against Jerusalem | 1-7. |
| 2- A sword, sharpened and polished | 8-17. |
| 3- The two ways of the king of Babylon | 18-24. |
| 4- Words against king Zedekiah | 25-27. |
| 5- A prophesy against the Amonites | 28-32. |

1- A PROPHECY AGAINST JERUSALEM

He commanded His prophet to set his face toward Jerusalem (Ez 21:1), and to prophesy frankly against the holy land, the holy city, and the holy temple.

The prophet Ezekiel, who previously, and in several situations, interceded and supplicated for them (Ez 9:8), is now called to proclaim God’s judgment that will come over Israel that declared its rejection of the commandment, and its open stubbornness. He is uttering the words of God; saying: “*Behold, I am against you, and I will draw My sword out of its sheath, and cut off both righteous and wicked from you*” (Ez 21:3). This does not mean that He will kill both of them without discernment. But He will set aside the righteous, to transfer him to the land of the Chaldeans; like the good figs (Jer 24); and will cut off the wicked, by having him killed in Judah. Thus the land would lose the two of them through captivation and the sword. The Lord has clarified His position concerning the good figs in Jeremiah as such: “*Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judas, whom I have sent out of this place for their own good, into the land of the Chaldeans. For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them out. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their*

whole heart” (Jer 24:5-7). So although He would cut off both the good and the bad figs from Jerusalem; but He will discern between this and that.

He asked His prophet to sigh with bitterness before their eyes; and it shall be when they ask him why he is sighing, he would answer: *“Because of the news. When it comes, every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming and shall be brought to pass”* (Ez 21:7). Here God does not speak parables, but gives real news and actual facts, before which all would tremble!

2- A SWORD, SHARPENED AND POLISHED

This sword is not Nebuchadnezzar’s, but it is the sword of God Himself, who uses that king for chastisement. It does a good job. It is sharpened and polished; slays the princes of Judah; together with their people. A great and deadly sword, that thrusts once, twice and thrice. It comes the first time after an oral warning; and the second time after the prophet strikes his thigh (Ez 21:12); and the third time after he strikes his hands together (Ez 21:14). It is as though drawing the sword is not a goal by itself; but it is drawn when the people and those responsible disregard the warnings of God.

It is to be noticed that, while it is a sharpened sword, to slay the wicked; but, for the children of God, it is a rod of chastisement, to cut off in them the green branch (the pagan worship), and not their souls; describing it as: *“The scepter of My Son despises all sticks”* (Ez 21:10); and not all souls. It is coming to cut off evil and sin; and not the sinners. It is a *“testing sword”* (Ez 21:13). if someone despises it, he shall be no more; But if someone turns from his evil; he shall be saved.

It is also to be noticed, that it is drawn against the people as well as against all the princes of Israel, who rejected the prophecy. It is not prejudiced on the side of a ruler at the expense of the people; all are equal before it.

Finally, it stands at every gate, thrusting right and left; sparing no one (Ez 21:15, 16).

3- THE TWO WAYS OF THE KING OF BABYLON

It seems that the king of Babylon came to a point where the road parted to two directions: one leads to Jerusalem and the other to Rabbah,

the capital of the Amonites. Then he started to meditate, which of them he should attack at first: Jerusalem or Rabbah. He used every pagan divination; from burnishing arrows to shoot to either ways and make a lot, to consulting his idols, to looking at the liver of the sacrifice he offered to his god. The answer came, to start by Jerusalem. Apparently, the answer came through his evil pagan ways; but actually, it was God who covertly planned for the chastisement. Divination is false, but God the Almighty, turned the evil ways of the king into a way to chasten the people.

It is to be noticed that the Lord says: *“Appoint a road for the sword to go to... Judah, into fortified Jerusalem”* (Ez 21:20). It seems that the majority of the people of Judah, came together to Jerusalem, on the assumption that, even if all the cities of Judah fell, God would defend Jerusalem, being ‘the city of the Great King.’ But God confirms that Jerusalem will take the first mighty blow; not only before the other cities of Judah, but also before those of the Amonites. Jerusalem that came to know much about God, was found worthy of the bigger blow; because its iniquity is not out of ignorance, or lack of knowledge, but out of rebellion and disobedience.

4- WORDS AGAINST KING ZEDEKIAH

Here God directs His talk directly against king Zedekiah, who destroys his people by his wickedness; saying: *“Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel...; whose day has come to remove the turban and to take off the crown”* (Ez 21:25, 26). Thinking of himself as great, he destroyed his people. That is why the situation will be reversed, and the arrogant king will lose his crown forever: *“Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown...; Until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him”* (Ez 21:27). The Lord Christ will come with His humility to reign forever.

If the people of Zedekiah perished through the counsel of their king; the Lord of glory will reign, and raise His people and save them, to reign together with Him forever.

5- A PROPHECY AGAINST THE AMONITES

The Amonites, having been spared the sword of judgment, because of the preoccupation of Nebuchadnezzar with Jerusalem, rejoiced for the calamity of the people of Jerusalem. They reproached

the people who perished, and Jerusalem that was burned. Yet, while the chastisement of Jerusalem was to be temporary, until the time when the spiritual King comes and saves the believers, the sword that will destroy the Amonites; the same one that destroyed Judah, will strike, not to chasten but to consume those who will be remembered no more.

The Amonites did not enter into a covenant with God, as Israel did; yet they fell to divine chastisement; because God does not stand iniquity, in the life of His own people, or that of others.

The Amonites refer to sin, but not to sinners; to perish by a mighty hand, and to be no longer. (The Amonites were struck five years after Jerusalem).

THE SWORD THAT DESTROYS, AND THE EXECUTER

O God, You used Nebuchadnezzar as a sword to destroy.
Every heart melted; all hands became feeble, and all knees became weak
like water.
You struck with the sword to discern, in the heart, between the evil and
the good!
You meant by the sword to lead to repentance, and to return to You!
Before Your chastisement, my soul trembles, and all my being shake!
As long as the sword is in Your hand, O Almighty, O Lover of mankind.
My soul will find peace and comfort, O You who accept the sinners!
If You allow for chastisement, Allow also for my repentance.
Make me repent; and heal me!

The Amonites reproached Jerusalem and all Judah, on the day of their
chastisement.
But the same sword that chastened Judah, destroyed the Amonites!
Destroy the Amonites inside me;
And chasten Jerusalem inside me!
Scatter all evil inside me;
And sanctify Your work in me, O the Grantor of salvation and life!
I have peace, as long as the sword is in Your own hand, O My Savior!

CHAPTER 22

THE SINS OF JUDAH

After introducing the song of the sword that destroys, He presented three messages concerning Judah, including a list of the sins it has committed; their effect on it; and how these sins were common on all levels.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- A list of the sins committed by Judah | 1-16. |
| 2- Condemning Judah as dross in a furnace | 17-22. |
| 3- Sin prevails on all levels | 23-31. |

1- A LIST OF THE SINS COMMITTED BY JUDAH

The Lord introduced a summary of the most serious sins, that the kingdom of Judah were committing in those days; and concentrated them in two categories: the shedding of blood (Ez 22:3), and the defilement by idols (Ez 22:5); instead of being the just and holy city.

a- It was called ‘a blood shedder;’ as in it horrible crimes were committed, and innocent blood was shed; not in the narrow literal sense of the word, but in the wider sense. That is why God considers insulting a parent, oppressing the stranger, the orphans and the widow, taking bribes, and being usurious with the needy, as crimes of blood shedding; as in them, there is oppression and extortion of the rights of others.

For the Christian, who sees Christ transfigured in every man, any extortion of a right of others, is counted as an insult directed to the Lord Christ Himself.

That is what the Lord Himself confirmed concerning His position on the great day of Judgment; when He says to those on His right hand: *“Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me”* (Mat 25:40); and to those on His left: *“Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me”* (Mat 25:45).

b- It was called ‘the one with defiled name;’ because it was guilty of abominations that profaned the name of God Himself, who is the Master of the city; being ‘the city of the Great King;’ the most serious of those abominations are: despising His sanctuaries, profaning His Sabbaths, and committing adultery in its worst forms, like against

close relatives (as a sister or a daughter-in-law); a neighbor's wife or a woman who is set apart during her impurity.

2- CONDEMNING JUDAH AS DROSS IN FIRE

Before division into two kingdoms (Israel and Judah), Israel, in the days of king David and his son king Solomon, was like a glittering golden head. After division, it became like two bars of silver; But, having been diverted to several pagan worships, and having been swept into blood shedding and abominations, they turned into bronze, tin, iron, and lead... cheap and lowly kinds of metal; and even into dross, that burns when put in the fire. The fault here, is not in the fire, but in the material that is subjected to it: If it is gold or silver it becomes more pure and shiny; but if it is dross, it will be consumed and thrown away.

In bitter admonishment He says: "*The house of Israel has become dross to Me*" (Ez 22:18); as though proclaiming, that what they came to be because of their wickedness, they will not alone bear its consequences, but it will profane even the name of God Himself, who acquired them and gave them His name. Every sin we commit, will hurt the feelings of God Himself, because we are His children; and because of us, His name is profaned among the nations.

3- SIN PREVAILS ON ALL LEVELS

After presenting a list of the most horrible sins committed by Judah, to become dross to the Lord, He confirmed again that this plague infected all: prophets, priests, rulers, and people. The prophets became like lions, but not to protect people, but to devour them and to turn their women into widows. The priests, instead of proclaiming the divine commandment, and sanctifying the people through pure worship, they disregarded God's statutes and judgments, and profaned His sanctities, especially His Sabbaths. The rulers, instead of providing for their people, they cared for their dishonest gain, and turned into wild wolves tearing their preys. As to the people, their nature changed to violence and oppression.

It is noteworthy that He does not say: "My prophets; My priests; the rulers of My people; and My people;" but says: "*her prophets; her priests; her rulers; the people of the land*" (Ez 22:25-28). He does not attribute them to Himself in their wickedness; because they have rejected Him, and alienated themselves from Him. So He in turn, rejects

them to chasten them, and to provoke them to return to Him.

He describe Jerusalem with all those levels, as such: *“You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation”* (Ez 22:24). The Jews with all their levels denied faith in Jesus Christ; the rain that comes down from heaven to cleanse the whole world, and to make out of the hearts a fertile Paradise. They became a land that is not cleansed or rained on; namely, a land without Christ; with no one to intercede on their behalf in the day of indignation.

That reminds us of the sign that Gideon requested from God in the first night: *“I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said”* (Judges 6:37). The fleece refers to the Jewish people who, alone among all nations, received the word of God in the Old Testament. So it was, the fleece alone soaked with dew, while it was dry on all the ground around it. On the next night, referring to the New Testament, Gideon requested from God to let the fleece alone be dry, and all the ground around it to be covered with dew; a reference to the rejection of the Lord Christ by the Jewish people - the Word of God or the Heavenly Dew; while the Gentile world receive faith in Him. The Jewish nation so became the land ‘not rained on’!

Finally, having proclaimed that sin prevailed on all levels, God admonished them saying: *“I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one”* (Ez 22:30). Who is this man, who can build a wall before the wrath of God; and who can stand as an intercessor on behalf of all humanity, that He should not destroy it?!

There was no being who could bear the wrath of God on the land, and intercede on its behalf. That is why He sent His Only-Begotten Son, as a Son of Man; who, alone, can stand in the gap, bear the divine wrath in His body for our sake; and intercede for us by His pure blood; and bring us back to the bosom of the Father.

Concerning this, **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says: [Being the Word of God, and above all; He alone had the natural worthiness to renew the creation of everything, to bear on behalf of all, and to intercede for all to the Father.] [It was necessary that no one except God

the Logos Himself should incarnate; “*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings*” (Heb 2:10). By this he means, that it was not for anyone else to save them, except for the Word of God who has created them from the beginning... By the sacrifice of His body, He put an end to the verdict against us¹.]

What does He mean by saying: “*Stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land*” (Ez 22:30)? The Son of Man, the incarnate Word of God, stood in the gap between God the Father and mankind, to reconcile between them (1 Tim 2:5). We as well; having enjoyed the reconciliation with God, long to stand in the gap, to labor and to pray for the sake of every sinner, to encounter with His Savior, and to experience the same reconciliation that we got. Let everyone of us be that man who may stand in the gap before God, to intercede and do his best, yearning for the salvation of everyone. And as the apostle Paul says: “*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God*” (2 Cor 5:20).

Here also, he confirms the importance of praying and interceding for others; If God finds no one to intercede on behalf of His people, there would be desolation among them. He saved Lot from the deadly fire, through the prayer of Abraham (Gen 19); saved Israel from destruction through that of the prophet Moses (Num 14:11- 21); and saved Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib through the prayer of king Hezekiah (Is 37:1-7; 34-36).

WHO WOULD STAND IN THE GAP?

My inner Jerusalem became dross;
So why should I blame the fire that consumed it?!
My oppressing heart sheds the blood of the poor and needy;
And my unclean thoughts profaned the temple of the Lord in me;
A gap came to separate me from You, O God!
Who would fill this gap?!
Who would stand in this gap before You to intercede on my behalf - the

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، 1967، ص 232-234.

foremost among sinners?!

Who would pay my debt and renew my nature, to encounter with You?

I thank You, O My Savior; the incarnate Word of God.
You alone bore my sins.
You alone have been raised on the cross.
You have turned my earth into heaven!
You provided me with Your Holy Spirit working in me;
And lifted up my heart to the bosom of God Your Father!
O, You the amazing and unique Intercessor;
Grant me to love the sinners, pray for them, and be self-sacrificed for
their love.

CHAPTER 23

OHOLAH AND OHOLIBAH

In this chapter, the history of the people of God in old days is presented through two sisters. He called them ‘Oholah and Oholibah,’ who coveted foreigners and committed treason against God.

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|--|---------------|
| 1- Treason of Oholah (Samaria) | 1-10. |
| 2- Betrayal of Oholibah (Jerusalem) | 11-21. |
| 3- Judgment of Jerusalem | 22-35. |
| 4- A final statement to the two sisters | 36-49. |

1- TREASON OF OHOLAH (SAMARIA)

This is the third and last time in the book of Ezekiel, in which God accuses His people of high treason (Ch 16; 20; 23). Yet there is a difference between His accusation in chapter 16 and here. In the former, he talked about treason of His people against the heavenly Groom; concerning their spiritual diversions. But here, He concentrates on the diversion of both divisions of His people (Israel and Samaria) to harlotry through erroneous political thought; namely leaning, sometimes on Assyria, and sometimes on the Pharaoh of Egypt. This leaning, that God considered as an insult to Him, and a lack of faith in His ability to save them; has opened the gates of the holy land to receive the idols and abominations of Babylon and Egypt at that time.

God portrayed Israel and Judah as two sisters, daughters of one mother, who led a life of harlotry since their early age; the older is called ‘Oholah,’ referring to Samaria the capital of Israel; and the younger is called ‘Oholibah,’ referring to Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. The first refers to Samaria, capital of Israel; the first is the older, as it embraced ten tribes, and the second is the younger, as it embraced only two tribes.

The two names were derived of the Hebrew word ‘Ohel,’ meaning “a tent.” He probably intended to remind His people, that actually they are committed to be the ‘Tent,’ to which He comes with His glory to dwell together with His people (Exod 33:7-10). And probably also meant by so calling them, to remind them of their sojourn on earth; that they are not to settle down in permanent houses, but in shifting tents, to be able to cross over from one condition to a better one, and from glory to glory. And as **Origen** says: [He dwells in tents, who

runs toward God, free and with no shackles or burdens¹.]

[If we inquire about the difference between a house and a tent... The house is a something set and steady; with fixed boundaries; while the tent is the dwelling place of nomads who are all the time on the move, and their journey will come to an end².]

That is why the Hebrews had the feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:43) as a reminder of their dwelling in booths in the wilderness. And as **Origen** says: [It is fitting for each of us, as he departs from the land of Egypt (love of the world), and enters into the wilderness, to dwell in a tent, and to celebrate a feast in tents. Of what materials should these tents be made, but of the words of the Law, the prophets, the psalms, and all the statutes?! When the soul grows by the Holy Scriptures, it forgets those things which are behind, and reaches forward to those things which are ahead (Phil 3:13); forsakes the lowly places; grows, and progresses to what is greater; grows in virtues, and changes the place of dwelling through its continuous progress; By this we can say that we are dwelling in the tent³.]

Going back to the two sisters, we find that they were daughters of one mother, having been one people. The two sisters both fell into harlotry since their youth in the land of Egypt. They shamelessly surrendered their bodies to evil; lost their spiritual virginity, and opened up their hearts to the idols of Egypt since their youth; something that was revealed in the wilderness, when they made the golden calf of Apis to worship it in the absence of Moses on the mountain. And as we said before in our interpretation of the book of Exodus, that the absence of Moses caused a wrangle that exposed the gods which the people secretly carried in their hearts.

Oholah (Israel) grew up, but did not mature spiritually, nor learned a lesson from her fall in Egypt; but lusted for the desirable young Assyrian men, clothed in purple; captains and rulers; horsemen riding on horses (Ez 23:5, 6). The Lord says: "*Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine*" (Ez 23:5); namely, she rejected Me as her Groom, and sought strangers for herself. She rejected the true heavenly Lord, and lusted for those clothed in purple (a symbol of heaven), who

¹ In *Exod.*, hom., 5:2.

² In *Num.*, hom 17:3.

³ In *Num.*, hom 17:3.

pretended to be religious while they were lusty and violent earthly ones; she rejected her Groom who fought for her in the land of her bondage, in the wilderness, and on her entrance into the land of promise; assuming that those horsemen are capable of protecting her, under the care of the king of Assyria, in the year 738 B.C. This leaning on Assyria, led the later to think of destroying Israel in the year 721 B.C.

The children of Israel did not only lean on Assyria politically, but lusted for its gods, and ran after its idols and abominations; as said: *“The children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities... They set for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree... They worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they cause their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger (2 Kings 17).* That is why the Lord delivered them into the hand of those they lusted for according to their hearts’ desire; to come under captivity; uncovered their nakedness; namely brought them into shame and disgrace; and killed their sons and daughters. The children of Israel became like a treasonous woman, who tasted the bitterness of her treason before all women, to turn into an example for all of them!

This is a living portrait of the nature and activity of sin; it is deceptive and attractive; after which man runs, on the assumption that in it, he would find carnal and mental fulfillment. Yet it would soon trample him under its feet, deprive him of his dignity and peace of mind, beside harming him physically, spiritually, and psychologically. The wise king Solomon described the work of the harlot in the life of those falling into her snares; saying: *“Lurking at every corner; she caught him and kissed him. With an impudent face she said to him: ‘Today I have paid my vows. So I came out to meet you, diligently to seek your face, and I have found you. I have spread my bed with tapestry, colored coverings of Egyptian linen. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until morning’... With her inciting speech she caused him to yield. With her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, he would not know it would take his life” (Prov 7:12-23).*

2- TREASON OF OHOLIBAH (JERUSALEM)

The younger sister “Jerusalem” did not benefit, neither from her own fall in her youth in the land of Egypt, together with her older sister (before their schism), nor from the experience of her older sister Oholah, who ran after Assyria and worshipped their gods, and eventually fell into captivity. On the contrary, she finally filled the cup of her wickedness, more so than what Samaria her sister did before her; The Lord says: *“Although her sister Oholibah saw this, she became more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister’s harlotry”* (Ez 23:11). Indeed after the schism, the kings of Judah appeared more sanctified than the kings of Israel; and when it diverted, some reformers tried to uproot the abominations; but she soon returned once again, in the days of Manasseh, to corruption in a more horrible way than Israel in its worst days. That corruption extended over a long period; and this chapter demonstrates its features:

a- Jerusalem lusted for the choice men of Assyria, for the sake of the luxury of their clothes that reflected the greatness of their appearance; beside their strength as young desirable men; those things deceived her like her sister. Jerusalem did not benefit from the experience of her sister, but did what was more corrupt; as Ahaz king of Jerusalem sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying: *‘I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Aram and the king of Israel, who rise up against me.’ And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king’s house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria”* (2 Kings 16:7, 8).

b- The young men of Assyria did not have the chance to seduce Jerusalem, who sought them to come to commit evil with her, even before seeing them or encountering with them. She looked at their images portrayed on the wall, and instantaneously lusted for them. It was the evil that lurked in her heart, she ran after it, and sought it; and not the evil that sought her and tried to seduce her.

Some youth fall sometimes into what they call ‘love from the first sight,’ on their first encounter with someone of the other sex. Psychologists see in such love, a kind of immaturity; as it is not based upon rational study, but attached to mere emotion and physical attraction, a decision taken by the inexperienced. Judah did not even fall

into lust from the first sight, but through seeing portraits on the wall! She was completely immature!

c- She did not stop at falling for Assyria, through seeing portraits of its young men; but she got back to the Pharaoh of Egypt, seeking to play the harlot as she previously did in her youth (Ez 23:19). She turned into a horrible human being, seeking this, and running after that, impetuously and with no fulfillment. Here is also a reference to the leaning upon the Pharaoh of Egypt, to rescue Jerusalem from Assyria, as done by king Zedekiah.

A girl who lusts for a young man, and proclaims to him that she has dedicated her whole heart to him alone; then does the same thing with another one, would be considered a loose girl who spreads deception here and there. So how would it be, if she does that with someone, and with his enemy at the same time? That is what the kingdom of Judah did, in her relationship with Assyria and the Pharaoh of Egypt!

Oholah represented a symbolic image of the soul that is attracted by sin; although shining, beautiful, and attractive, yet deadly and a killer. Oholibah, on the other hand, represents the soul that staggers right and left, runs after the sin, seeking it, unwittingly, hastingly, and with no fulfillment.

3- JUDGMENT ON OHOLIBAH (JERUSALEM)

Seeing how Jerusalem has not benefited from the lesson that her sister Samaria has gone through (captivity), but became more corrupt. God used her lovers - the Babylonians, all the Chaldeans, especially the tribes of war: Pekod, Shoa, Koa; and all the Assyrians with them, to chasten her.

'Pekod' was an Aramic tribe that dwelt in the plains, east to the River Tigris, not far from its lower part (Jer 50:21).

'Shoa' is a Semite name meaning "wealthy;" an Aramic tribe that dwelt to the east of Babylon; and was in continuous war with the Assyrians, who used to call them in their records 'Soter.'

'Koa,' was a tribe that joined the Babylonians in their attack on Jerusalem. It is most probably the same tribe called 'Kutu' in the records of the Assyrians; that dwelt east to the River Tigris.

Admiring those tribes as men of war and horsemen (Ez 23:23) God delivered her to them to humiliate her, as Babylon attacked Jerusalem, destroyed all her capacities, and distorted every beauty in her; as the Lord says: *“They shall remove your nose and your ears, And your remnant shall fall by the sword. They shall take your sons and your daughters, And your remnant shall be devoured by fire. They shall also strip you of your clothes, and take away your beautiful jewelry. Thus I will make you cease your lewdness and your harlotry, brought from the land of Egypt, so that you will not lift your eyes to them, nor remember Egypt anymore”* (Ez 23:25-27).

They shall remove her nose; namely, her king, who should have led her, with a sense of discernment between the safe and the risky ways. So if he erroneously resorted to the Pharaoh of Egypt against the king of Babylon, he would be removed from Jerusalem. As far as we are concerned, the fruit of sin is our loss of the spirit of discernment, by which we would realize the truth, and reject the vain; then we live with neither a taste for truth, nor a realization of knowledge.

As to removing the ears, this refers to captivating the priests and the king’s counselors; who, instead of listening to the true prophets, they listened to the false and evil counsels, and pushed the people to perdition. Thus, by opening our ears to vain counsels, we would lose our recognition of the voice of God; like ‘Eli’ the priest, who did not recognize the call of the Lord, heard by the child Samuel.

“And your remnant shall fall by the sword” (Ez 23:25). This is a reference to the people who will perish as a result of their lewdness; as a symbol of the body that would be defiled and would perish because of our deprivation of the grace of discernment, and of listening to the divine voice.

As to causing sons and daughters to pass through fire; that was through the use of human sacrifices to the god ‘Ba’al or Moloch;’ a reference to wasting energies and talents, that, instead of being used for the glory of God and for the edification of souls, they are used on the account of the devil, the destruction of soul, and stumbling others.

Leaving her naked and bare of clothes and jewelry, refer to her public shame and disgrace before the nations. This is the end of the sinner, who loses all his dignity, to become disgraced before all;

especially in the great day of the Lord; who says: “*You shall be laughed to scorn and held in derision*” (Ez 23:32). That is she shall be an example and shame after being completely destroyed by sin.

4- A FINAL STATEMENT TO THE TWO SISTERS

This final statement, God addresses to the two sisters together, to reveal and proclaim the horror of their lewdness; concerning both the abominations and the blood shed:

a- They committed a marital treason; having forsaken God, and worshipped the idols; defiled His sanctuaries and profaned His Sabbaths; to become worse than the Gentiles. So it shall be, as the believer diverts, and mixes the holies with the evil; the name of God and His holies shall be blasphemed because of his actions.

b- They committed the most horrible of barbarian crimes: sacrificing their children - the children of God - to the god ‘Moloch.’

c- They sent for men to come from afar, to play the harlot with them; adorned themselves with ornaments; and used God’s incense and oil for evil. They did not fall by accident, or through seduction by others; but planned everything by themselves; and used even the divine sanctuaries to persuade others to commit lewdness with them.

d- They received from their lover’s bracelets for their hands and crowns for their heads, instead of God’s gifts and eternal crowns.

By that, they deserved to be chastened by the hands of those, with whom they shared the worship of their idols and abominations; and to whom they surrendered their bodies and hearts; “*that all women may be taught not to practice their lewdness*” (Ez 23:48). By that, He probably means that the Church of the New Testament, that came from the Gentiles, who was a harlot before; if it returns to God through faith in the Lord Christ, and entered into a life of purity, it will benefit from that lesson, that was realized in these two kingdoms in the old days.

GRANT ME TO BENEFIT FROM THE FALLS OF MY BROTHERS

Grant me to benefit from the fall of my brothers.
Samaria, the capital of Israel has fallen;
And Jerusalem the capital of Judah, did not benefit;
Assuming that she is above all laws!

Instead of repenting, she fell in lewdness;
And became more corrupt than her sister!
Teach me, O God, to refrain from judging anyone;
From being haughty; but to benefit from the falls of my brothers!

I admit my weakness to You;
And cry out to You, seeking Your mercies.
Support me; and support my brothers!
Help me; and help them;
So that we would be all saved;
And would enjoy the fellowship of Your glories,
O You Lover of mankind!

CHAPTER 24

THE FINAL SIEGE

That was the final talk about the ultimate captivity of Judah, and the destruction of the city of the great King; It started with his vision of the fiery divine chariot; to set his heart aflame amid the bitter news and ended by this bitter speech: the pot set on the fire; and the silent sighs of his heart, like kindled fire inside him, for the sudden death of his wife - the desire of his eyes - without mourning or proclaiming his grief for her.

1- The pot and the fire 1-14.

2- The death of the prophet's wife 15-27.

1- THE POT AND THE FIRE

The Lord set to the prophet Ezekiel, the ninth year of the reign of Jehoiachin, in the tenth month, on the tenth day, as the date when king Nebuchadnezzar would be coming to Jerusalem. God commanded him to write down that date in his records; that conformed to the date of the ultimate siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1). It is as though the Lord intended to proclaim that what is going on, is neither accidental, nor according to human planning, but are events allowed by a divine plan, according to precise timing.

The Lord commanded Ezekiel to utter a parable “*to the rebellious house*” (Ez 24:3), that would become desolate. He likened Jerusalem to a pot full of scum (rust); in which were put choice cuts of meat, “*the thigh and the shoulder,*” beside choice bones to be boiled with them. The words of God were: “*Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum is in it, and whose scum is not gone from it! Bring it out piece-by-piece, on which no lot has fallen... Heap on the wood; kindle the fire; Cook the meat well, Mix in the spices, and let the cuts be burned up. Then set the pot empty on the coals, that it might become hot and its bronze may burn; that its filthiness may be melted in it; that its scum may be consumed*” (Ez 24:6-11).

He saw Jerusalem as a pot, and fire kindled beneath it, the way the prophet Jeremiah saw it (Jer 1:13). Yet with a conception different from what the rulers of the people held, when they assumed that Jerusalem is the pot that protects the meat inside it; and that nobody can

reach the meat as long as it is inside the pot (Exod. 11:3). They assumed that Jerusalem remains a bronze wall that protects those inside it; protected by God whatever the circumstances are; because it is His city. Here Ezekiel proclaims that, on the contrary, it is the pot underneath which God will kindle the fire of His fury, because of its scum, namely its corruption. Fire refers to the bitterness of captivity, and to the destruction of everything in it by a divine command; saying to the Chaldeans: *“Heap on the wood; kindle the fire.”* Her lewdness so much increased, thus she needs a lot of fire to chasten her.

Putting water with the meat pieces inside the pot is a reference to the state of looseness that Judah has reached; both rulers and people. All became like water: helpless and fluid!

Putting the choice pieces of thigh and shoulder, together with the bones, refers to the fact that neither the rulers nor the people will be spared. All will fall in the fire; and will be *“brought out piece by piece, on which no lot has fallen;”* a sign that all will come out of the city, regardless of anybody’s dignity, capabilities or possibilities; All will be scattered in a foreign land. Jerusalem will be emptied of her people, and destroyed, to be purified of her increasing scum. The pagan worship has entered the temple of God and His sanctuaries; on every high place on mountains and hills, as well as in valleys, on the banks of rivers, and underneath every green tree.

It is a horrible portrait of Jerusalem consumed by fire. Yet that is not without purpose. **St. Jerome** believes that in this situation, there is hope for reform; saying: [Placing the meat in the pot means that sinners would become gentler; their violence would change and would turn to God; with hearts of flesh instead of stone... What a great mercy!.. What a great mystery! The pieces of meat are put in the pot, for the heart of man to melt; and to know that the Lord is God!¹]

2- THE DEATH OF HIS WIFE

That was the last of God’s proclamations to the prophet Ezekiel concerning the ultimate captivation of Judah, and the destruction of the city. It reached the climax, as the divine command came to him that his wife would die; and that he should proclaim this to the men of Judah; that he should not mourn for her, nor shed a tear on her; should sigh in

¹ *On Ps.. Homily, 34.*

silence; bind his turban on his head; put his sandals on his feet; should not cover his lips; and should not eat man's bread of sorrow; although his wife was the "*desire of his eyes*"! He spoke to the people as such in the morning, and at the evening his wife died; and he did as he was commanded, on the next day.

It is a horrible portrait of the coming destruction of the people - God's beloved bride - with nobody to mourn for her or shed a tear because of the deadly grief. The tongue will stop talking, the tears will dry up; and man will be swallowed up by inner sorrow, and would become as though spellbound!

All that was realized; and that was the last arrow to hit the prophet Ezekiel; being a sign to them (Ez 24:24, 27). He bitterly sighed in silence; not capable of uttering a word; refused to accept the bread of men; namely the bread of sorrow; as people of the east used to send food to the house of sorrow to eat. He would not accept fulfillment from a human hand, nor be comforted by man!

He made no mourning for his wife. As in Jerusalem there was nobody who cared to cry for those killed and cast away or to shed a tear on them. As to binding the turban, putting on the sandals, and not covering the lips; all those were a sign that there is no more way to remain in the house to grieve. Everyone should get out and escape. Nobody should mourn for the dead! His wife died by night in the dark; a sign of their being unprepared for those events, despite the continuous divine warnings through His prophets!

A FUNERAL WITH NO TEARS

You likened Your people to meat in a rusty pot.
Fire is kindled with no benefit.
The meat done, but it is poisoned!

Allow me, O God, to benefit from the fire of Your chastisement!
Rid my heart of the rust of sin.
And uproot the poisonous roots from my depths.
Then, I would benefit from the fire of Your chastisement;
And become useful food.

You allowed for Your prophet's wife to die.

She was the desire of his eyes, which he loved;
Yet he does not mourn for her,
And would not accept comfort from anyone!
She died in the darkness of the night.
Like that, my very precious soul would die.
It would die amid the darkness of sin.
I would accept no comfort from anybody.
But I would seek Your help and Your comfort.
You are alone capable of raising it from the darkness of the grave.
You would make it a holy temple for Your Holy Spirit!

THE FOURTH SECTION

PROCLAMATIONS AGAINST THE NATIONS TO CHASTEN THEM

EZEKIEL 25 - 32

As Jerusalem entered under siege, and fell under chastisement; the prophet Ezekiel started to proclaim the setting of the new kingdom; something that initially needs the destruction of evil. Thus the prophecies came against the nations that rejoiced for the calamity of Israel, as a symbol of the destruction of the power of the devil, in order to enter into the real reform in the Messianic era, and the return of humanity from the captivity of sin. It is as though reform would be realized through two integrated aspects: the destruction of the kingdom of evil; and the setting of the kingdom of God.

That is what we saw in our study of the special liturgies of Baptism¹; where the trend appears clear in the denial of the devil and driving away the powers of evil on one side, and accepting the kingdom of Christ on the other side. It is as though the Catechumen, in order to be received in the spiritual army of salvation, is committed to forsake the army of the devil. That is why **Fr. Theodore of Mopsuestia** says to the Catechumens: [As long as the devil whom you once obeyed through the head of your race (Adam), is the cause of all the evils that befell you, you have to promise to forsake him².] [Now, having been chosen for the kingdom of heaven, you could easily be recognized; If you are examined by someone, he would find you a soldier in the army of the King of heaven³.]

THEIR SYMBOLIC COUNT

St. Jerome, in his interpretation of the psalms, noticed that the count of the oppressive nations in the Old Testament, as it came in psalm 83, is 11 and not 12. Although strong and arrogant, yet they do not reach the count of perfection - 12 - that refers to God's kingdom on earth. The enemy may seem strong, but if we were armed with God Himself, he would greatly weaken. That is why the Psalmist cries out, saying: *“Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace; and do not be still, O God! For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head”* (Ps 83:1, 2); Then he says: *“O God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind! As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire, So pursue them with Your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm; Fill*

¹ للمؤلف : الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر .

² PG 44 :984 A.

³ Cat. Hom. 13:17.

their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O Lord. Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; Yes, let them be put to shame and perish” (Ps 83:13-17).

That is why **St. John Chrysostom** often confirms that the devil, even if he pretends to have great authority, yet he actually has no authority upon us; but he deceives us. Sin, although all its victims are strong, yet, it is actually weak and helpless if we reject it. By our fear we fall in the captivity of the devil. When we accept the sin inside us, we become humiliated by it.

Yet the nations against whom the prophet Ezekiel prophesied, are seven; a reference to the destruction of all the powers of evil; the figure 7 refers to consummation. They will have no place in the kingdom of God. It is also noticed that Babylon was not mentioned among those foreign nations; probably because it was the chastening tool that was used by God.

Finally, Ezekiel was not the only one to proclaim those prophesies; that were also proclaimed by Jeremiah (46 -51), Isaiah (13 - 23), Amos (1, 2), and Zephaniah (2:4-15).

CHAPTER 25

PROCLAMATIONS AGAINST FOUR NATIONS THAT REJOICED FOR THE CALAMITY OF ISRAEL

If Israel in the Old Testament referred to the people of God, the nations that opposed her in the old age, were symbols of evil and sin. Thus, if God proclaimed the chastisement of His people in long statements and in various ways, yet now He comes to proclaim His destruction of evil through those symbols. He started by the four enemies, whose animosity to the people of Israel goes back to the time prior to the establishment of the kingdom of Israel; and grew along the years. These four enemies are: Amon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia.

- 1- Proclamation against Amon 1-7.**
- 2- Proclamation against Moab 8-11.**
- 3- Proclamation against Edom 12-14.**
- 4- Proclamation against Philistia 15-17.**

1- PROCLAMATION AGAINST AMON

The Amonites were descendants of 'Ben- Ammi'¹. They were fierce, and used to offer their children as sacrifices to the god Molech (1 Kings 11:5-33); and worshipped Chemosh, the leading deity of the Moabites in the days of 'Jephthah' (Judges 11:24). They joined forces with the Moabites against the children of Israel; That is why God proclaimed that no one of them shall join the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation (Deut 23:3).

They were in continuous war against Israel (1 Sam 11:1-10; 2 Sam 12:26-31; 2 Chr 20:1; 2 Kings 24:2). And when Judah fell into the Babylonian captivity, the king of Babylon set 'Gedaliah' in Jerusalem, a governor in his name; to gather together the remnants of the Jews. Baalis king of the Amonites sent Ishmael son of Nathaniah and killed Gedaliah to scatter the Jews (Jer 40, 41). They used all the time, to

¹ *BEN-AM'MI* (ben-am'i; "son of my kindred"). A son of Lot by his youngest daughter. He was the progenitor of the Ammonites (Gen 19:38), twentieth century B.C. (From *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois.)

reproach the Jews in their captivity; which led the prophet Jeremiah to threaten them with devastation (Jer 49:1-6); so did Amos (2:13-15), and Zephaniah (2:8, 11). They opposed Nehemiah as he tried to build the wall of Jerusalem after the captivity (Neh 4:3, 7). Finally the Jews fought them in the days of the Maccabees; then their history dwindled gradually in the days of the Greeks and the Romans. The city of Amman was built over the remains of their capital 'Rabbah' of the Amonites.

God commanded the prophet Ezekiel to set his face against the Amonites and prophesy against them (Ez 25:2); as though representing God, "*The face of the Lord is against those who do evil*" (Ps 34:16). If the Lord has proclaimed His chastisements against Israel; that was for the sake of their repentance. But, as far as the Amonites are concerned, who represent the sin of pride, God set His face against them, to wipe them out for good.

The Amonites represented the sin of pride, which is the first of iniquities; saying: "*Because you said 'Aha' against My sanctuary... Because you clapped your hands, stamped your feet, and rejoiced in heart with all your disdain for the land of Israel*" (Ez 25:3, 6). She haughtily stood to boast against the sanctuary of the Lord; clapping her hands, stamping her feet, and rejoicing in heart for what befell Jerusalem; things that Ezekiel has not seen by his own eyes, having been in the land of captivity; yet was revealed by the Lord to him. For that the Lord delivered her as a possession to the men of the east (Ez 25:4), to use all her possibilities, and to turn her capital 'Rabbah,' into a stable for camels, and a resting place for the flocks of sheep (Ez 25:5).

In their pride they rejoiced for the desolation and tribulation of Judah; unaware that five years later, Nebuchadnezzar will return to attack her, and destroy her capital, the beautiful city 'Rabbah¹;' and for the Aramaean and the Arab tribes, to use as a stable for camels, and a resting place for the flocks of sheep.

When man exalts himself with pride, he falls, his splendor turns into desolation; and his heart becomes a pastureland for the beasts. "The

¹ *Meaning greatness of size or numbers. The chief city of the Ammonites. Known as Rabbah of the people of Ammon (Deut 3:11; 2 Sam 12:26). Rabbah is the only Ammonite city mentioned in the Bible. It was at the headwaters of the Jabbok River, 37 kilometers (23 miles) east of the Jordan. Today it is one of the most important Arab cities of the Middle East-Amman, Jordan.(Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publisher)*

herds shall lie down in her midst, every beast of the nation” (Zeph 2 :14). Man turns from his delicate humanity, with which God created him, according to His image and likeness, to a wild irrational animal. That is pride that drove king Nebuchadnezzar from men, made his dwelling with the beasts of the field, and let him eat grass like oxen (Dan 4:25). That is why the Fathers of the Church used to care very much for enjoying the spirit of humility, and for escaping from pride. One of them said: [Do not dwell in a place with a name; and do not sit with someone with a great name¹.] And **St. Basil the Great** says: [If you want to be known to God, be sure to be unknown to men².] And **Abbot Timothy** says: [If men dignify you, you should become afraid... Escape from dignity, to keep your boat from sinking³.]

2- PROCLAMATION AGAINST MOAB

If the Amonites were the descendants of ‘Ben Aami’ the son of Lot from his younger daughter; Moab, on the other hand, was his son from his older daughter; so named because his mother conceived him from her father Lot, while he was totally drunk; and called ‘Moab;’ namely, “from the father.” That is why **St. Jerome** considered Moab to refer to the devil, and to represent those who are away from God their Father, those who do not mind about their Father⁴.

The descendants of Moab extended over east of the Sea of Lot, from where they expelled the ‘Emims;’⁵ and worshipped the god ‘Chemosh.’ Their relationship with the Hebrews was sometimes good; the latter have been commanded by God not to harass them, nor to take any of their possessions (Deut 2:9). But most of the time, it was otherwise. In the time of the Judges, the Moabites submitted the Hebrews and made them pay taxes, until Ehud killed Eglon the king of Moab (Judges 3:12-30). ‘Ruth,’ the girl who loved and protected her mother-in-law, was a Moabite.

¹ بستان الرهبان ، طبعة 1968 ، ص 338.

² المرجع السابق ، ص 341.

³ المرجع السابق ص 341.

⁴ On Ps., hom 34.

⁵ A giant war-like race, which occupied the region E. of the Dead Sea, in which the Moabites succeeded them (Gen 14:5; Deut 2:10). Perhaps related to "Amu" the Egyptian word in the hieroglyphics for nomadic Shemites. The Hebrew means "terrible ones." The Rephaim were on the N.E. of Jordan, the Zuzim next, then the Emim, then the Horim on the S.E.; all gigantic. (Fausset's Bible Dictionary)

King Saul fought the Moabites; and when David fled from his face, he placed his parents under their protection (1 Sam 22:3, 4); But when he became a king, “*he forced them down to the ground*” (2 Sam 8:2), and made them his servants. After the death of Solomon, Moab became a part of the Northern Kingdom; and in the reign of king Jehoshaphat, they attacked Judea, but were defeated before it (2 Kings 3). After that Moab was sometimes independent and sometimes not; and in the days of king Jehoiakim, the Moabites joined forces with the Chaldeans against Judah (2 Kings 24:2).

In his prophecy against Moab, Ezekiel connected it to ‘Seir’ (Ez 25:8), the center of the Edomites, on account of their mutual evil. ‘Seir,’ a Hebrew word meaning “with dense hair,” was given to the land taken by Esau or ‘Edom’ and his descendants (Gen 32:3). The Mountain of Seir, in the land of Judah (Jos 15:10) is a mountainous province on the eastern side of the Arabian wilderness.

If the nation of the Amonites refers to the sin of pride; that of Moab refers to the ‘**lack of discernment**,’ having thought that there is no difference between the living God and the pagan gods; and assumed, when Judah was destroyed and Jerusalem was devastated, that there will be no more of them: “*The house of Judas is like all the nations*” (Ez 25:8). That is why God chastened them by clearing the territory of Moab of the fortified cities on its frontier, the glory of the country: Beth Jeshimoth¹, Baal Meon², and Kirjathaim³, who is the source of their strength; let the Chaldeans destroy them, and left them desolate to be used by the people of the east for their beasts, the way they did to the Amonites.

If the Amonites lost their life because of their pride; so will the Moabites lose theirs, because of their lack of discernment or

¹ “House or place of deserts”. A town in Moab, not far E of the mouth of the Jordan and just N of the Dead Sea (Num 33:49; Josh 12:3; 13:20; Ezek 25:9). Belonging to Sihon, king of the Amorites (Josh 12:3). It is to be identified with Tell el Azeima. (*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois.)

² Means “owner of an habitation.” St. Jerome describes it as a very large village, nine miles from Heshbon.

³ A town of Reuben. Belonged first to the Emim (Gen 14:5 Shaveh Kiriathaim. “the plain of Kiriathaim,” or of the two cities) whom the Moabites dispossessed before the exodus (Deut 2:10-11). Moab lost and recovered Kiriathaim when the trans-jordanic tribes were carried captive (Jer 48:1,23; Ezek 25:9).

discrimination. And as **St. Ephraim the Syrian** says that without mud a tower would not be built; and [with no knowledge virtue would not be set¹.]

3- PROCLAMATION AGAINST EDMOM

‘Edom’ means “red” or “Bloody, blood- shedder.” It also means “from the earth².” That is why the Edomites refer to blood shedding or to the sin of oppression.

‘Edom’ is the title of Esau, who was fierce in his animosity to his brother Jacob. The region dwelt by Esau has been named after Edom; namely the land of ‘Seir’ (Gen 32:3); a rough mountainous region, taken up by Esau and his descendants after driving out the Horites (Deut 2:12). They did not allow the Hebrews to pass through their land after the later came out of the land of Egypt (Num 20:14-41); although they were considered as their brothers (Deut 23:7, 8). When King David invaded Edom, and set a garrison there (Num 24:18), Hadad, one of its princes, fled to the land of Egypt, and became an adversary to king Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-22). In the days of Jehoshaphat, the Edomites, the Amonites, and the Moabites invaded Judah; then turned against one another (2 Chr 20:1, 22-23). The Edomites helped Israel and Judah in their war against Mesha king of Moab (2 Kings 3:4-27); but rebelled in the days of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, who defeated but did not submit them (2 Kings 8:20; 1 Chr 21:8-10). Amazia king of Judah put to death 10,000 of the Edomites, having them thrown from over a cliff in the Valley of Salt, and took over Sela³ their capital (2 Kings 14:7, 2; 2 Chr 25:11, 12). The Edomites invaded the tribe of Judah; and took captives of them in the days of Ahaz, and rejoiced when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem (Ps 137:7). Then they took it over up, to Hebron. The prophet prophesied against it because of its fierce animosity toward Israel; and prophesied its mergence among the kingdom of God (Jer 49:7-22; Lam 4:21, 22; Joel 3:19). In the fifth century B.C., the Nabataeans drove them out from the Mount of Seir. And in the second century B.C. Judah the Maccabee took over Hebron

¹ بستان الرهبان، ص 441.

² St. Jerome: *On Ps., hom. 15:34.*

³ It means “rock;” *Judg 1:36; cf. Obad 3.* Probably the capital city of the Edomites, later known as Petra. It took its name from its situation and the mode in which it was built, since it was erected in a valley surrounded by rocks and in such a manner that the houses were partly hewn in the natural rock.

and other cities, that were previously taken over by the Edomites. John Heralcos forced the Edomites to undergo circumcision, and brought them over into the congregation of the Jews¹. Herod the Great has been an Edomite.

If Edom refers to the sin of oppression and blood shedding, it faced the same destiny. Therefore thus says the Lord God: “*I will also stretch out My hand against Edom, cut off man and beast from it*” (Ez 25:13). Whoever kills by the sword, by the sword he will be killed; He made it desolate from Teman in the north to Dedan in the south; all fell by the sword.

4- PROCLAMATION AGAINST PHILISTIA

The Philistines in the Old Testament represented fierce animosity against the people of God. **St. Jerome** interprets their name to mean “death as a result of a poisonous dose.” That is why, according to him, they represented those who drink from the cup of seduction of the devil, to fall on the spot². They, like the Edomites, acted in revenge against Judah; and might have been provoked by them to do that. Anyhow, Nebuchadnezzar defeated them, shortly after the fall of Jerusalem.

The Cherethites he cut off (Ez 25:16), might have been a Philistine congregation who came from the Island of Crete during the first quarter of the twelfth century B.C.

The animosity between the Hebrews and the Philistines dates back to the entrance of the former into the Promised Land; and their taking over some of their cities. After the death of Joshua (Judges 1:18) the Philistines took back their cities, and the Hebrews fell into their hands (Judges 10:6, 7), then they were later delivered. The Philistines then came back to humiliate the Hebrews for 40 years, before Samson delivered them (Judges 14-16). In the days of the prophet Samuel, the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant of God (1 Sam 4-6); to be defeated by king David after 20 years. In the days of king Saul they fought the Hebrews; and David twice took refuge in their land; yet when he reigned he fought them. After the death of David, we no longer heard much of them.

¹ *Josephus: Antiq. lib 13, chap 17.*

² *On Ps., homily 15.*

**DEVASTATE, O GOD, THE CORRUPTION OF THE GENTILES
IN ME**

I know the extent of Your love for mankind; for all nations!
What Your prophets proclaimed, implied the devastation of evil in me!
Who are the Amonites, but the pride that gets my soul down?!
And who are the Moabites, but my rejection of Your fatherhood, and
referring myself to another father?!
And who are the Edomites, but my violent and bloodthirsty nature?!
And who are the ancient Philistines, but my inner confusion?!
Devastate, O Lord my corruption,
To be sanctified for you!
Devastate my pride,
To enjoy Your humility!
Get me back to Your Fatherhood,
To forsake that of the devil!
Renew my stony heart,
To have compassion toward everyone!
Uproot every confusion in me,
To harbor Your everlasting peace!

CHAPTER 26

PROCLAMATION AGAINST TYRE

After parading the proclamations against the Amonites, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the Philistines, the following three chapters are dedicated to proclamations against Tyre: The first of them talked about the judgment of Tyre; the second included a lamentation for it, and the third is a proclamation against its king. The first chapter (26) talked about:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1- The transgressions of Tyre | 1-2. |
| 2- God is against Tyre | 3-6. |
| 3- Nebuchadnezzar destroys Tyre | 7-14. |
| 4- The effect of the destruction of Tyre on the other coastlands | 15-19. |
| 5- Bringing Tyre down to the lower parts of the earth | 20-21. |

1- THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF TYRE

Tyre is a well-known Phoenician city that appeared in the year 2750 B.C. on land. But with time, and for defensive reasons, it was moved to a close-by rocky island, that carried the same name, of 142 acres, and had two ports. It is closer to Israel than Sidon, and greater. The Hebrews did not occupy it in the days of Joshua; and its king sent materials of construction to king David (2 Sam 5:11), and to king Solomon (1 Kings 9:10-14). The people of Tyre delivered the children of Israel to Edom (Amos 1:9); confiscated their goods; and sold them as slaves to the Greeks (Joel 3:5, 6). Nebuchadnezzar besieged it for 13 years (585-573 B.C.), before it negotiated with him and recognized his authority. It was also besieged by Alexander the Great, who occupied it in the year 332 B.C. Then she readily resumed its glory, and after his death she fell under the authority of the Selucians, then the Romans.

On its coasts, the Lord Christ passed (Mat 15:21-28; and Mark 7:24-31); and was approached by some of its people (Mark 3:8; Luke 6:17). Christianity came to it in the apostolic era (Acts 21:3, 4). **Origen** was buried in the Basilica of Tyre; and **St. Paulinus** built in it a magnificent cathedral, where the Historian **Eusebius** gave a sermon on the day of its dedication the year 323. In the fourth century, it was described by **St. Jerome**, as the most honored and beautiful of the

Phoenician cities that had commercial relationships with the whole world. It was distinguished among the Dioceses of the Antiochian See, next to Antioch itself. Its head used to deliver the pastoral staff to the Patriarch on the day of his ordainment¹.

The name 'Tyre' is a Semite name meaning "rock;" probably because it was built on a rocky island. But **St. Jerome** believes that the word 'Tyre' in Hebrew means 'a tribulation².' That is why he sees its inhabitants to represent those who fell under the tribulation of the devil.

Anyhow, this proclamation (Ez 26) against Tyre, came in the eleventh year, on the first day of the month; namely, after the devastation of Jerusalem; although no news concerning that reached the prophet Ezekiel, nor the captives in its first stage; not before the twelfth year, on the fifth day of the tenth month (Ez 33:21).

The sin of Tyre was greed; having benefited from, and rejoiced for the desolation of Jerusalem; saying: "*Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples. Now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled. She is laid waste*" (Ez 26:2). Jerusalem has been like the gateways (gates) of the peoples, in one of two concepts: Either it was as strong as closed gates, that other peoples could not force open, then turned desolate; to be trampled by everyone; its gates wide open before Tyre and other nations; or that it (Jerusalem) was a center for international trade; and by its desolation, its gates became wide open before Tyre, to take away all her customers, and to get richer at its expense; as Tyre lived on commerce.

2- GOD IS AGAINST TYRE

Having rejoiced for the desolation of Jerusalem, and was prepared to benefit from her calamity; God Himself stands against Tyre; and will cause many nations to come up against it; as the sea waves incessantly come up. He speaks to it with the language it understands, as an island in the sea. It assumed that, through the desolation of Jerusalem, ships from all over the world would come over to it seeking its goods and bringing prosperity. Yet, the sea, instead of sending ships to Tyre, is sending its waves to destroy its walls, break down its towers, and scrape

¹ قاموس الكتاب المقدس ، ص 559-561.

New Westminster Dict. of the Bible, "Tyre".

² PL 25:240.

its dust from it, to turn it into a completely bare rock.

It rejoiced because the closed gates of Jerusalem, were forced wide open to it. Yet, here is Tyre itself, has become without gates, or towers, and even without dust, a bare rock, unfit for life; uninhabitable by man, and beasts; and on which even plants will not grow. Indeed, who assumes that his fellow man has become a spoil to him, God will make him a spoil to others; and will even make him of no use whatsoever! This is the fruit of greed in the life of man!

3- NEBUCHADNEZZAR DESTROYS TYRE

If Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Jerusalem, he also besieged Tyre with his army for 13 years until he entered it and made it a plunder for him and his army. The prophet Ezekiel portrayed the conditions in Tyre in the following points:

a- Its daughter villages will be slain (Ez 26:8). He probably means its customers who used to come to it from all over the world for trade... Daughters symbolize the works and fruits of the flesh; as whoever rejoices for the afflictions of his fellow man, will become fruitless. Instead of benefiting from the desolation of Jerusalem, Tyre lost all material fruits!

b- The multitude of his army, chariots, and horses, will cause the dust to cover it; thus she loses every vision and beauty; as a result it will be deserted by its visitors!

c- Its people will be slain by the sword; and its strong pillars will fall to the ground (Ez 26:11); a sign of the killing of the people and rulers, who will fall down to dust from wealth and dignity.

d- Its riches will be plundered, its merchandise will be pillaged; its walls will be broken down; its pleasant houses will be destroyed; its stones, timber, and soil, will be laid in the middle of the water; to turn into a rock, completely bare even of dust!

e- The sound of its songs, of its harps, and its joy, shall be heard no more (Ez 26:13).

That is the work of greed; man will not only lose what he hoped to get, but will also lose his riches, strength, beauty, joy, and his health. He will lose others, and will become deprived of his humanity, and all vitality in him!

Tyre assumed that it would acquire much gain through the desolation of Jerusalem. Yet it, not only suffered material losses, but it also lost its sons and daughters!

It assumed that it would gain the attention of the whole world, after the destruction of Jerusalem. But instead, it became surrounded by armies; covered by dust; and mocked by everyone. It expected great dignity and greatness; but instead, it had its people with its rulers killed.

Instead of the gains it expected through the desolation of Jerusalem, it became a spoil for plunderers; lost all its inaccessibility, her beauty vanished; and turned into a bare rock. It sang and danced with joy for the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, its joy and rejoice were taken away from it!

4- EFFECT OF ITS DESTRUCTION ON THE OTHER COASTLANDS

“Will the coastlands not shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded cry, when slaughter is made in the midst of you? Then all the princes of the sea will come down from their thrones, lay aside their robes, and take off their embroidered garments; they will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble every moment, and be astonished at you. And they will make up a lamentation for you”(Ez 26:15-17).

The collapse of Tyre shook all the other islands. They assumed that that rich and famous island that stood like a rock in the middle of the sea was unapproachable. Yet Tyre collapsed. What would then be the destiny of the smaller islands?! There would be no need for fighting them; but their princes would come down from their thrones, lay aside their robes, clothe themselves with trembling, and helplessly sit on the ground in fear. They will make up a lamentation for Tyre, when actually they are doing it for themselves!

Ananias and his wife Sapphira fell and died because of their greed. They lied to the Holy Spirit, and kept back of the price of the land for themselves (Acts 5:3). Great fear came upon all those who heard these things. They became like the greedy Tyre; and lost their life beside their possessions, and became an example for others.

Those islands probably refer to the traders who used to come to it, or to the ships that came loaded with goods from all over the world.

They made up a lamentation for Tyre, the center of trade. How amazing! When Jerusalem, the city of the great King fell, nobody mourned for it, but on the contrary, many mocked her and felt joy for her calamity! But when Tyre was destroyed, the islands came to mourn for her. Jerusalem fell, yet God set her up after being chastised. But Tyre fell, was mourned for by the world, then stayed down, and was even wiped out all together! So the believer may fall under chastisement, and may find nobody to feel sorry for him, but the eye of God will have compassion on him and will support him. On the other hand, the wicked that persists on his wickedness, when he falls, he may be mourned for by many, yet he will not arise again! He probably means here, evil itself that falls and never arises!

5- BRINGING TYRE DOWN TO THE LOWER PARTS OF THE EARTH

“Then I will bring you down with those who descend into the pit, to the people of the old, and I will make you dwell in the lowest part of the earth, in places desolate from antiquity, with those who go down to the pit, so that you may never be inhabited. And I shall establish glory in the land of the living. I will make you a terror, and you shall be no more; though you are sought for, you will never be found again’ says the Lord” (Ez 26:20, 21).

If Tyre represents the sin of greed; although it seems at the beginning shiny, attractive, and sought by many; yet it is deceptive; and will be wiped out, never to be found again. It is, like so many other sins, thought by man to be his whole fulfillment, pleasure, and happiness. Yet man will soon discover that it does not really exist; it is like mirage, after which man runs, but will never reach it!

LET IT FALL, SO THAT I MAY BECOME RICH!

Let it fall, so that I may become rich!
That is what Tyre sang, when Jerusalem fell!
It rejoiced with greed, at the expense of others!

I wonder, what did Tyre gain through the destruction of Jerusalem?
Instead of acquiring new traders, it lost its daughters.
Instead of the preoccupation of the world with it alone, it became a
booty for the armies.
Instead of acquiring dignity, its people were killed.
And instead of joy and songs, it became a miserable bare rock!

O Lord! Teach me love and mercy.
Let me not rejoice for the afflictions of my fellow men;
And let me not use them to my benefit!
Take Tyre out of my heart;
Grant me to give to my fellow men;
To share their feelings;
And to count them as my joy and my crown!

CHAPTER 27

A LAMENTATION FOR TYRE

The Lord commanded Ezekiel to take up a lamentation for Tyre; that includes the following items:

- 1- A perfect portrait of a Phoenician ship 1-11.
- 2- Its precious cargo 12-24.
- 3- The breakdown of the ship 25-36.

1- A PERFECT PORTRAIT OF A PHOENICIAN SHIP

If Jerusalem refers to the soul that received the grace of God - In the Old Testament, it refers to the Church that enjoyed Moses' Law, and the prophets. And in the New Testament, it refers to the Church that came to enjoy the eternal salvation through the divine grace in Christ Jesus. Tyre, on the other hand, represents the natural man: his position, possibilities, God's gifts to him, then his fall and collapse through sin. What he says here about Tyre, apply to the whole human nature. He likened it to a Phoenician ship in an excellent location; that deals with a multitude of nations; strongly built, very luxurious in its manufacture, and in its crew; not lacking a single thing. This is man "the work of God the Lover of mankind."

God set it "*at the entrance of the sea*" (Ez 27:3); Tyre is situated east of the Mediterranean Sea, as a beautiful island with two harbors. Its location makes it capable of attracting traders from all the countries of the east; "*merchant of the peoples on many coastlands*" (Ez 27:3); "*Your borders are in the midst of the sea*" (Ez 27:4). God set man at the entrance of the seas, "*above all earthly creation;*" being "*made in the image of God; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle over all the earth, over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth*" (Gen 1:26). He granted him all this (trade) to become a master and not a slave to the temporal earthly things. He made his borders on all the seas; namely have dominion over every thing. He did not wish us to live in a condition of material or psychological deprivation; but to have fulfillment in everything.

As **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says in his article on creation that God did not create man before He created first the world as his royal palace; as it is not fitting to proclaim a king before his royal palace is set.

God made man beautiful in everything; the most perfect of His creation on earth. That is why after creating him it is said: “*Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good*” (Gen 1:31). The lamentation says: “*Your builders have perfected your beauty*” (Ez 27:4). The source of our beauty is God Who built our life; and granted us the inner possibilities and the body as a free gift from Him. But man in the pride of his heart, instead of giving thanks and glory to God, he refers every perfection to himself; The lamentation says: “*Tyre, You have said, ‘I am of perfect beauty’*” (Ez 27:3). The sources of its beauty are:

All its ship boards are made of fir trees of Senir¹. Its masts are made of cedars from Lebanon. Its oars are made of oaks of Bashan²;

Its benches are made of ivory brought from the islands of Cyprus. Its sails are made of embroidered linen from Egypt. Its covers are blue and purple from the isles of Elishah³. Its mariners are inhabitants of Sidon⁴ and Arvad⁵. Its pilots are wise men from Tyre itself.

¹ It means “pointed,” and so “peak.” The name given by the Amorites to Mt. Hermon, the highest mountain in the Anti-Lebanon range. The Sidonians called it Sirion, and in Ps 29:6 Sirion is used poetically for Hermon.

² This name is probably the same in meaning as the cognate Arabic bathneh, “soft, fertile land,” or bathaniyeh (batanaea), “this land sown with wheat.” A rich, fertile tableland about 490 to 700 meters (1600 to 2300 feet) above sea level, with abundant rainfall and volcanic soil, Bashan became the “breadbasket” of the region. Wheat fields and livestock were abundant. But in the Old Testament, the prosperity of Bashan became a symbol of selfish indulgence and arrogant pride. Evil persons who attacked the righteous were compared to “strong bulls of Bashan” (Ps 22:12). The pampered, pleasure-seeking women of Samaria were called “cows of Bashan” (Amos 4:1)(Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary).

³ It means “God saves”; Elisa, Eleisai: Mentioned in Gen 10:4 as the eldest son of Javan, and in Ezek 27:7 as the source from which the Tyrians obtained their purple dyes. On the ground of this latter statement attempts have been made to identify it with Southern Italy or the north of Africa. Josephus (Ant, I, vi, 1) identified Elishah with the Aeolians. The Targum on Ezekiel gives “the province of Italy.” Other suggestions include Hellas, Ells, and Alsa; the last named is a kingdom mentioned in the Tell el-Amarna Letters, but its precise location is unknown. It is impossible as yet to claim certainty for any of these conjectures. (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

⁴ It means “a fishery.” Sidon was the oldest of the Phoenician cities, on the Mediterranean coast in northern Palestine. Built on a hill across several small islands, it was connected by bridges. Founded by the son of Canaan (Gen 10:15), it became a principal Canaanite stronghold (Gen 10:19; 1 Chron 1:13; Zidon, KJV). So dominant was Sidon originally that Sidonian and Phoenician became interchangeable terms. Even after the city of Tyre on the coast to the south assumed a position of dominance, Ethbaal, king of Tyre, was called king of the Sidonians (1 Kings 16:31).

⁵ A rocky island off the coast of Syria, two miles from the shore, and peopled by marines and soldiers (Ezek 27:8,11). It is modern Rouad, a little more than two miles from the shore to the

Its elders and wise men of Gebal caulked its seams. Its guardsmen are from Persia, Lud¹, and Phut².

So the lamentation presents many details about the material of construction of the ship, the nationalities of its crew, and men of war. It is noteworthy that, for the Gentiles, a ship often refers to the journey of life, that man lives in this world, to enter into the ultimate harbor; as did the ark of Noah that symbolized the Church, or to humanity that enjoyed divine salvation; That is why churches were often built after the shape of a ship³. And as **St. Hippolytus** says:

[The sea is the world, into which the Church goes to its depths, but will not perish; as her capable captain is the Lord Christ Himself. Carrying the cross of the Lord, she carries in herself the conquest over death... The crew is the two Testaments: The New and the Old.

The mountains surrounding it are the love of Christ that binds the Church.

Its net, is the new font of Baptism, that renews the believers.

The Holy Spirit is dwelling in it, as a capable Sailor with whom the believers are sealed...

Its iron anchors, are the commandments of Christ Himself; strong as iron;

The crew on its right and on its left, are ministers like saintly angels, to protect and serve the Church.

South of Tartus. On that small island are Phoenician remains; there "the family" of the Arvadites settled. (The New Unger's Bible Dictionary).

¹ *Fourth of Shem's children (Gen 10:22). The Lydians of western Asia Minor (say some), whose manners and whose names were Semitic. But the geographic position is against this. Moses would not abruptly pass to the distant W. from the E., and then back to the S.E.; if the Lydians of western Asia were meant, the order would have been Elam, Asshur (Arphaxad), Aram, Lud; not Elam, Asshur (Arphaxad), Lud, Aram. Lud is to be looked for between Assyria and Syria. The Ruten or Luden of the Egyptian monuments, dwelling N. of Palestine, near Mesopotamia and Assyria. They warred with the Pharaohs of the 13 th, 14 th, and 15 th centuries B.C., under one of whom Moses lived (G. Rawlinson). The Luden may have migrated to western Asia at a later period. Thus, Lud will be the original stock of the Lydians. (Fausset's Bible Dictionary.)*

² *Third among Ham's sons (Gen 10:6; 1 Chron 1:8). The Coptic for Libya is Phaiat. Jerome (Traditional Hebrew) mentions a river of Mauritania and the adjoining region as called Phut. It is generally connected with Egypt and Ethiopia. The people of Phut dwelt close to Egypt and Ethiopia, and served in Egypt's armies with shield and bow. The Egyptian monuments mention a people, "Pet," whose emblem was the unstrung bow, and who dwelt in what is now Nubia, between Egypt and Ethiopia. (Fausset's Bible Dictionary).*

³ للمؤلف: كنيسة بيت الله، 1979، ص 85-92.

The gangplank by which we get on board the ship, is the memory of the passions of Christ, by which the hearts of believers are lifted up to heaven;

The sails above the ship are the fellowship of prophets, martyrs, and apostles, who enter into their comfort¹.]

And as the ship refers to humanity renewed through the cross of Christ, it also refers to human nature before falling. That is why the details mentioned in the lamentation, refer to God's gifts to us through our humanity, of good body, rational soul, blessed emotions, feelings, motives, and energies; as they are the work of the hands of the good and philanthropic God.

We can say that the planks or the boards of the ship, are the body members; its mast is the mind; its rudder is the tongue; its benches are the senses; its sail is the heart; its cover is the apparent behavior; its sailors are the inner energies of the soul; its captain is the spirit of discernment; its seam-caulkers are the talents; and its guards are the inner motives.

a- **All the ship boards** are of fir trees from Senir; namely, all the body members, that are like the boards of the ship, come from 'Senir' - the mount of light, and not the kingdom of darkness, as claimed by the Gnostics. The Fathers dealt often with this issue; **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Those (the followers of Mani), claim that the body comes from an evil origin... Do not they have to pierce their eyes, through which the lust enters the soul?! Actually, the eye or any other body member should not be blamed; but only our corrupt will².] He also says: [We are granted the eyes to behold the beautiful creation, and glorify the Lord God. But if we misuse them, they would become tools for adultery³.] **St. Augustine** says: [The Spirit is good, and so is the body; and man, formed of both, is definitely good; whether his goodness is few or much⁴.]

b- **The mast**; namely the mind, is made of the cedars of Lebanon, known for its straightness. God created for man a straight

¹ *De antichr.* 59.

² *In Cor. homily* 23:2.

³ هل الشيطان سلطان عليك؟ طبعة 1972 ، ص 58.

⁴ العفة 18.

mind, to lead him all his way without diversion; as, [A rational man has, indeed, a single interest, which is to obey the mighty God by all his heart, and to please Him. He teaches himself only one thing; namely to do his best to abide by God's commandment; giving Him thanks for His compassionate care, that works through everything happening in his life¹.]

c- **The rudder** that guides the ship is the tongue. The apostle James says: *“Look also at ships; although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue, is a little member and boasts great things”* (Jam 3:4, 5). **St. John Chrysostom** says: [We are given a tongue with which to teach and praise the Creator. Yet if we do not take care, it would become a tool for blasphemy².]

d- **The benches** are the senses, that should be made of decorated ivory; namely, should be filled with purity. **St. John Saba** says: [Everyone who wishes to keep his soul and conscience from wicked deeds, let him keep these senses, to deliver them in the hands of God, the Honest and Helper of the weak³.]

e- **The sail** is the heart, that should be made of embroidered pure linen. As when the heart is sanctified, man will be a dwelling place for God. That is why the Psalmist cries out to God: *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”* (Ps 51).

f- **The cover of the ship** is the behavior; ‘blue,’ namely carrying a heavenly nature, and ‘purple,’ namely carrying a royal feature. The behavior expresses what is inside the heart: If the heart is lifted up toward heaven, where our treasure is; our behavior will also be lifted up towards the heavenliness; and being with God the true King, our behavior would be fitting for the children of this King. That is why the apostle Paul says: *“He raised us up and let us sit with Him in the heavenly places;”* And also says, *“Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God”* (Col 3:1). **St. John Climacus** says: [Great is he, who quenches the fire resulting from

¹ القديس أنطونيوس الكبير (الفيلوكاليا، طبعة 1966، ص 19).

² للمؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، ص 313.

³ للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، ص 1033.

earthly lusts, through contemplating on the pleasures of heaven¹.]

g- **The seamen or oarsmen**, namely the inner energies of the soul, are brought from Sidon and Arvad. If ‘Sidon’ means “the place of fishing;” a living man is he, who uses his inner energies for construction, who lives as a clever fisherman, and who knows how to acquire what is for edification. If not, these energies itself, would be for destruction. And if they were not spiritual soldiers on the account of God’s kingdom, they would be evil soldiers on the account of the kingdom of darkness.

h- **Its captain or pilot** is the spirit of discernment, from Tyre, namely, unyielding like a rock. This is the secret of strength of a spiritual man. He walks with discernment; he knows how to discriminate between good and evil; truth and vain; light and darkness; to receive what is for his edification, and rejects what is for destruction; strongly, and without wavering.

i- The **Seams-caulkers** ; namely the talents, are elders and wise men from Gebal. God granted every man special talents, to kindle with strength and wisdom; to become for him like wise elders; working together with the talents of others, for the sake of the edification of humanity as one family.

j- As to its guardsmen; the inner motives of the soul, they are from Persia, Lud, and Phut; well-trained men of war, of various experiences, working to protect it: like anger, fear, motherhood, fatherhood, love, etc. These are all holy motives, if they work within the spiritual frame of edification. By anger, man gets rid of sin and blames himself; by fear, he is keen not to hurt the feelings of God. By motherhood, fatherhood, and love, he collects in his heart a pure love toward humanity, with a mature spirit of wisdom. These are the men of war within the soul; who, either work for, or against us. Whoever gets angry against others, and not against himself; whoever fears people and not God; and whoever loves for the sake of carnal lust, would turn these men of war against himself.

This is a quick and concise portrait of the ship “**of perfect beauty**,” that God granted us; namely the human nature, before its diversion and fall!

¹ *The Ladder, 15:11.*

2- ITS PRECIOUS CARGO

After dealing with the precious materials with which this ship is built, with its excellent crew, and its mighty men of war, he started to talk about its precious cargo brought from various countries. It likens the wise soul who knows how to benefit spiritually from everyone; despises no one, and does not solely depend on her experience. Man should be like a bee, knows how to draw from every flower everything sweet and beautiful!

In his talk about the merchandise traded by the ship. He went through them according to the geographical locations of their countries of origin; starting with the Mediterranean coasts, then the eastern nations in three parallel latitudes from south to north:

Tarshish: silver, iron, tin, and lead.

Javan, Tubal, and Meshech: slaves, and bronze pots.

Bet-Togarmah: horses, steeds, and mules.

Rhodes or Rodam: ivory tusks, and ebony.

Aram or Syria: emeralds, purple, embroidery, fine linen, corals, and rubies.

Judah and Israel: wheat of Minneth, millet, honey, oil, and balm.

Damascus: wine of Helbon, and white wool.

Dan and Javan: iron, cassia, and cane.

Dedans: saddlecloths for riding.

Arabia and Kedar: lambs, rams, and goats.

Sheba and Raamah: spices, precious stones, and gold.

Haran, Cannneh, and Eden: purple clothes, embroidered garments, and chests of multicolored apparel, in strong twined cords.

The following are some information on some of these countries:

Tarshish: This name probably comes from the word ‘*Rashash*,’ which in the Arcadian language, is connected to shiny metals and mine products; that is why this name is famous for ‘mineral refining¹.’ The people of Tarshish came from ‘Javan’ (Gen 10:4); thought to be ‘Tertisus,’ in southern Spain, close to the mountain of Gibraltar². And probably it is Cartage, a city in northwest Africa; that was very rich in metals, like silver beaten into plates (Jer 10:9), iron, tin, and lead. If

¹ James Hastings : *Dictionary of the Bible*. p. 958.

² Herod 1 :163 :4 :152.

Sheba and Dedans represent trade with the east, Tarshish represents trade with the west. That is why it came in the book of the Ezekiel, “*Sheba, Dedans, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you: ‘Have you come to take plunder. Have you gathered your army to take booty, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder?’*” (Ez 38:13)

When it is said, ‘*Ships of Tarshish,*’ that would not necessarily mean ships of the king of Tarshish, or that trade with Tarshish; but because of its fame in trade, this name is given to the great ships that cross the oceans to bring the precious metals.

We would not forget that when God commanded Jonah to preach in Nineveh in the east, he fled to the west in a ship that sailed to Tarshish (Jon 1:3).

Javan: came together with Tubal, and the coastlands afar mentioned in Isaiah 66:19, to which the Gentiles come to declare the glory of God. The people of Javan were mentioned as traders who used to purchase the captives of Judah and Israel, to send them far from their borders (Joel 3:6). And here in Ezekiel (27:13), together with Tubal and Mashech, as traders in human lives (captives and slave), beside in pots of bronze. These three phrases refer to the colonies of Javan; namely, of Greece, on the coasts of Asia Minor¹. It is to be noticed that the expression ‘Jonia’ is very close to that used by the Assyrians and the Egyptians, for Greece.

Javan, that mentioned in Ezekiel 27:19, refers to another Javan, that was most probably a tribe in Arabia, or a Greek colony in Arabia.

In (Daniel 8:21; 10:20; 11:2), Javan came as ‘Greece;’ and most probably refers here to the Greek Macedonian Empire.

Tuball and Meshech: Two peoples or provinces in Asia Minor, connected together (Is 66:19); and were related to Japheth (Gen 10:2; 1 Chro 1:5); that appeared in the Assyrian history by the names, Tabali and Mushki as fierce opponents against Assyria in the twelfth century B.C.

Bet-Togarmah: is located in the south of Armenia; has been dwelt by the descendants of Togarmah, the third son of Gomer (Gen

¹ James Hastings : Dictionary of the Bible. p. 460.

10:3; 1 Chro 1:6).

Dedan (Ez 27:15): A people in Northern Arabia, came from Cush the son of Ham (Gen 10:7); mentioned in Gen 25:3 as descendants of Abraham from Keturah, his second wife after the death of Sarah. It is not difficult to understand the connection here, if we remember the relationship between Arabia and Cush¹. They were traders from Arabia (Is 21:3), who dwelt south of the Edomites (Jer 25:23; 49:8). This name is still used in Dedan, southwest of Tima. But the modern Dedan is “El-Olla,” an oasis in the valley of El-Korah in the north of Hegaz.

Aram: This name comes from the Acadian language, meaning “the high land,” after Aram, one of Shem’s sons (Gen 10:22, 23). Aram extends from the mountains of Lebanon in the west, to beyond the River Euphrates in the east; and from the mountains of Tarsus in the north to Damascus in the south. In the Septuagint version, this province was called ‘Syria.’ Abraham was called a fugitive from Aram, because he came from Haran, a city in Aram (Gen 11:3), to Canaan (Deut 26:5). Several little Aramaean communities appeared, like Aram-Mesopotamia (Gen 24:10), where the two cities Nessibin and Edessa are located; Aram-Damascus, Aram-Zobah, west of the Euphrates (sometimes extending to the border of Hamath); Aram Maacah, close to the Mount of Hermon, a portion of the tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 12:5; 13:11); Gusher, an Aramaean country close to Maachah, east of the Jordan, also a portion of the tribe of Manasseh (Deut 3:14), to which Absalom the son of David fled after he killed his brother Amnon (2 Sam 13:37; 15:8); and Aram-Beth-rehob, most probably close to the entrance of Hamath (Num 13:21; Joshua 19:28).

Damascus: The capital of Syria; known since the old days as an important commercial center. It is located at the eastern side of the lesser Mountain of Lebanon. Out of these series of mountains, the two Rivers: Abana and Pharpar draw their waters (2 Kings 5:12); Nowadays they are called Barada and El-Awaj.

Dan: A Hebrew name meaning “a Judge;” a city north of the border of Palestine, called Laish (Judges 28:29) or Leshem (Jos 19:47). But it is not, as some people think by Tel-El Qadi (the Hill of the Judge), a misunderstanding because of the similarity of names; as Dan means

¹ James Hastings : *Dictionary of the Bible*. p. 209.

“judge.”

Kedar: A Semite name meaning “capable” or “black;” the second son of Ishmael (Gen 25:13), whose descendants were mostly shepherds who dwelt in black tents; hence Kedar became a symbol of black color (Song 1:5). Some of them were relatively civilized (Is 42:11), who owned herds of beasts and were men of war, especially well trained on throwing with the bow; who gallantly opposed Nebuchadnezzar, before he ultimately submitted them.

Sheba: Who, together with his brother Dan were mentioned as sons of Raamah, son of Cush (Gen 10:7). The two names were also mentioned as sons of Joktan the son of Abraham from his second wife Keturah (Gen 10:25). Sheba is considered as one of the important tribes of ancient peoples that dwelt south of Arabia: Chattramothites, Qatabanians, Mineans, and Hazarmaueth that was the most important among them in the days of Stroba. They were famous as traders of spices, gold, and precious stones; also traded in slaves; they were very rich and were considered as the guards of the desert (Job 1:15; 6:19). The Assyrian inscriptions provide us with the oldest record of the existence of Sheba; King Tiglathpileser the third (745-727 B C) stated that he received taxes from Etaamarah the king of Sheba.

It seems that some of the families of those people, who dwelt south west of the land (Gen 10:28) immigrated to Ethiopia (Cush), to be called ‘Cushites,’ while some others extended later to the northwest to reach Syria. The story of the queen of Sheba made them famous; also revealed how women reached high places among those people: socially, politically, and religiously.

Raamah: The son of Cush, father of Sheba and Dedans (Gen 10:7). It is difficult to fix the location of Ramah; whose inhabitants are thought to be descendants of Raamah; and thought by some to be ‘Regma Ptolemy’ west of the Persian Gulf; and by others to be Rammaitae south of Arabia, north west of Hazarmaueth, and east of the old Sheba; the later view is more probable.

Haran: The name is probably of Acadian origin, meaning “way” or “caravan;” a city located north west of Mesopotamia, on River Balikh, a branch of the River Euphrates; 280 miles north east of Damascus, and 60 miles east of ‘Carchemish’ (Gen 11:31, 32). It is

considered as one of the main crossroads between Babylon and the Mediterranean coast; and represents an important trade center; and the main center of worship to the god Sims of the moon. Terah and Abraham sojourned in it for sometime; then Nahor settled down there; to be called by his name (Gen 24:10; 27:43). It was taken over by the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:12). There, nowadays, is a small village that kept the name Haran.

Canneh: Thought by some scholars to be “Calneh” (Amos 6:2). But most probably it is an unknown Acadian city by the name of ‘Kannu,’ in the region of Mesopotamia, close to Haran.

Eden: A Hebrew name meaning “joy;” and is not the Garden of Eden. The province of Mesopotamia was mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions as ‘*Bit Adini*,’ south of Haran, half-way the River Euphrates.

3- THE BREAKDOWN OF THE SHIP (TYRE)

If Tyre became a mighty ship, of perfect construction, strong manned, had wise and well trained crew, well liked and favored by all the peoples that dealt with it; yet, as it tried to benefit from the affliction of its sister ‘Judas,’ on the day of its captivity; it got broken down by an east wind, that brought it to the depths of the sea, together with its riches, wares, crew, and men of war... with nobody to help or rescue. Many stood watching in grief, bitterly crying; shaved themselves completely bald, like someone mourning for a dead; and took up a lamentation over the city that used to fulfill them; kings trembled; while others hissed at it, and mocked it, because of its greed that made it lose its existence forever.

LEAD THE SHIP OF MY LIFE!

Tyre, the great city, is a ship made by You.

You made it, and granted it all riches.

But as it leaned upon its riches;

And opposed Your work;

It got completely broken down!

I am Your ship, O My Creator!

Lead the ship of my life; I am the creation of Your hands!

What are these boards of fir trees, but the members of my body?!

They are Your beautiful creation.

You have granted me the body and soul to glorify You!
Sanctify my eyes and all my senses, to be fulfilled by You!
Sanctify my emotions and my feelings, O the desire of my heart!
My body is in Your hands. It is Your precious gift to me!

What is this mast made of the cedar of Lebanon.
That You set for me, but that amazing mind?!
You created it straightforward to be preoccupied by You all along the
short journey of my life!
My mind contemplates on Your will; and so longs for obeying Your
commandment.

In it, it sees the sweetness of fellowship with You, O the Source of life!

What is this little rudder that directs all my life, but the tongue?!
Sanctify it, to keep it from blaspheming You.
And from cursing others;
And from moving in vain and with no goal.
Lead it to bless, praise, and give You thanks all the time;
And to bless people, and flow with sweetness on everyone!

What are these benches of ivory;
But the pure senses You granted me?!
Fulfill them by Your Holy Spirit, to see You as the heavenly Groom of
the soul.

Let them be aflame with love for You and for all Your creation!
They should not become a stage for devils;
Nor a playground for carnal lusts!
My senses, emotions, and all my feelings, are Yours, O my Beloved!

What is this sail, made of embroidered linen,
But my little heart, to which You granted purity?!
By Your Holy Spirit, it became spacious enough to carry Him, whom
the heaven and earth cannot accommodate!
Its key is in Your hand, O Son of David!
Come into it to dine.
Together with Your heavenly and earthly friends;
Turn it into Your joyful Kingdom, and Your holy temple!

What are these covers of the ship of my life ;
But the behavior I practice, through Your grace?!
It is blue, carrying the color of heaven;

And purple, like the garments of kings.
How amazing are You, O the heavenly King of kings.
You want me, with my behavior, to bear Your features.
To walk on earth with a heavenly heart.
And to live amid the afflictions of the world, as a king with authority!

Who are these seamen from Sidon, but the inner energies of the soul?!
Grant them to become a clever fishermen;
To work always for the edification of my soul, and those of my brothers;
Let them know nothing about destruction and devastation!
You have granted me amazing energies, as spiritual soldiers.
Lead them to work on the account of Your Kingdom.
So as not to be wicked soldiers on the account of the kingdom of
darkness!

Who is that pilot from Tyre;
But the spirit of discernment?!
It is a gift of Your Holy Spirit;
By which I can recognize good from bad;
By which I do not divert from Your royal way, right or left!!
And not to be deceived by self-righteousness; nor to be attracted by
lusts!
By which I can know You, O the Truth!

Who are those seam-caulkers, but the talents You gave me?!
Flare up. O Lord, Your talents in me;
To make me work with strength and wisdom!
To work in harmony with the talents of my brothers;
With no haughtiness, nor smallness of the soul.
I thank You for granting me the talents that suit me!

Who are those men of war from Persia, Lud, and Phut;
But the motives You have created in me?!
Motivated by love, I encounter with You, and I love Your creation!
Motivated by anger, I rebel against my sin, and complain my soul to
You!
Motivated by fear, I fear to offend You with love!
Sanctify all the motives, to keep them from any more diversion!

How miserable is Tyre; the rich and beautiful ship.
It leaned upon itself, and disobeyed its Creator.

So it broke down and sank in the sea of this world!

O You amazing Pilot, lead the ship of my life.

Let Your cross be the mast of my life;

And Your commandments, the seamen!

Grant me ropes to pull up my ship.

I am in the midst of the sea currents of this world.

But I am borne by Your Holy Spirit to the heavenly port!

CHAPTER 28

JUDGMENT AGAINST THE PRINCE OF TYRE

After prophesying against Tyre (Chapter 26), and taking up a lamentation over it (Chapter 27), He moved to proclaim against its prince, then to take up a lamentation over its king; He probably meant the whole royal family. Finally came a proclamation against Sidon, having been closely connected to Tyre.

- 1- A proclamation against the prince of Tyre 1-10.
- 2- A lamentation for the Prince of Tyre 11-19.
- 3- A proclamation against Sidon 20-25.

1- A PROCLAMATION AGAINST THE PRINCE OF TYRE

St. Jerome believes that the word ‘Tyre’ means a tribulation¹; That is why what came concerning the prince (or the king) of Tyre, refers to Satan, being the one who drives men to tribulations and temptations. Many Church Fathers believe that what came in this chapter describes the fall of Satan from his angelic rank. This description came conforming to what came in Isaiah 14:12 concerning Lucifer.

It is to be noticed in this chapter that the prince or the king of Tyre, has been described as the good, even the perfect creation of God; because Satan was not created evil; but is God’s good creation, that has fallen because of pride by its own free will.

He was described as such:

“You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

You were in Eden, the garden of God.

Every precious stone was your covering.....;

Prepared for you on the day of your creation.

You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you.

You were on the holy mountain of God.

You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.

You were perfect in your ways from the day of you were created, till iniquity was found in you” (Ez 28:12-15).

¹ PL 25:240.

Satan was one of the greatest heavenly ranks - that of the cherubim, bearers of the divine throne; the fiery divine chariot! He has been the seal of perfection, as he was a bearer of the throne; Full of wisdom, as he was filled with eyes; Perfect in beauty, as he reflected God's splendor on him; Every precious stone was his covering, as God spared him nothing. He shaded with his wings over the holy mountain of God; Wherever he went, he proclaimed the presence of God who sanctifies everything. He walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones, a sign of the fiery divine presence. He was created flawless; perfect in all his ways.

It is obvious that the talk here does not apply to men, the most perfect of God's creation on earth, nor on any heavenly rank, but to the greatest and most exalted of those ranks... **Tertullian** says: [If we go back to the prophecy of Ezekiel, we find that that angel was created perfect, but got corrupted by choice. In the person of the king of Tyre, it was said of Satan: "*You were the seal of perfection etc.*" It is obvious that this description (Ez 11-16) concerns the rebellion of the angel, and not the king of Tyre. As, there is nobody among human beings, who was born in the Paradise of God - not even Adam himself, who was moved to it; nor who was a cherub to be put on the holy mountain of God; namely, on the highest of heavens, except him, about whom the Lord testified that he fell like lightning from there (Luke 10:18)¹.]

Origen speaks about Satan and his angels as good creation that sinned by its own free will, saying: [Those who claim that Satan is not a creation of God are wrong; As Satan, he is not God's creation; but the being himself (as a creature), is God's creation. That is like saying that a killer is not God's creation. But he, as a man, he is God's creation².]

And **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says: [The devil was not committed to sin; as though he had a natural tendency toward sin; or else the cause of sin would also reflect on his Creator Himself. He was a good creation, and by his own free will, he became Satan; He received the name through his work. He was an Archangel; but came to be called a devil because of his slandering. From being a good servant of God, but became a devil indeed; as 'devil' means 'adversary.' This God, he has become rightly named Satan; for "Satan" is interpreted the adversary.

¹ *Tert. Adv. Marc. 2:10.*

² *In Job. tome 2.c7.*

And this is not my teaching, but that of the inspired prophet Ezekiel; who took up a lamentation for him saying: “*You were the seal of perfection;... perfect in beauty;... born in Eden, the Paradise of God;*” then says: “*You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.*” He says: “*Till iniquities were found in you.*” Iniquities did not come to him from outside, but he brought them on himself. Then he instantly referred to the cause, saying: “*Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground*” (Ez 28:17). This conforms to the saying of the Lord in the gospel: “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*” (Luke 10:18)¹.]

Taking up a lamentation for Satan, he proclaims the gifts of God given to him, and the possibilities he received the day he was created. As much as he is given, much he would be asked to give; and as much as he enjoyed of great exaltation, his fall would be as great. The most important of the divine gifts given to him are:

a- **The gift of wisdom:** “*Behold, you are wiser than Daniel! There is no secret that can be hidden from you*” (Ez 28:3). He granted him wisdom, to be wiser than Daniel; to whom God revealed the king’s secrets, his personal dreams, and their interpretation, to support him in his sojourn. It is as though God, in His dealings with Satan before his fall, has revealed to him many secrets; saying to him: “*There is no secret that can be hidden from you.*” He dealt with him as a trusted friend; and hid no secret from him. Saying to him: “*You were the seal of perfection; full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty,*” He made him the most perfect and most beautiful of His heavenly creation; not in outer appearance but in wisdom. Yet, as he fell into pride, he fell from that height down to the abyss!

Man as well, the most perfect of God’s creation on earth. God adorned him, not by the beauty of the body, but by what is greater: the beauty of wisdom; creating him “*in His image, and according to His likeness*” (Gen 1:26). He intended him to be a master, to have authority on all the earthly creation, by the spirit of divine wisdom. Yet, as pride degraded the angel to Satan; it likewise degraded man to his corrupt carnal nature; that led him to behave far lower than animal, even the wildest of them.

¹ *Cat Hom 2:5.*

b- **Dwelling in Eden, the garden of God** (Ez 28:13): The word ‘Eden’ means “joy;” as though, after setting him in the divine joy, enjoying the divine presence; even sharing with the rest of the cherubim, in bearing the divine throne; he came to an inner endless torture.

So was man; God set him in Eden the Garden of God to work and rejoice; but through his pride, he lost his true Paradise; and deprived himself of God the Source of joy. That is why, in order to mend our nature, we were committed to be planted anew in God, to become as though in the eternal Paradise. That is why **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says to those seeking Baptism: [Soon, Paradise will be opened to everyone of you¹]; as they enter into union with God in Christ Jesus, the True Paradise.

c- **The gift of work:** The Lord Christ says: “*My Father has been working until now; and I have been working*” (John 5:17). It is one of God’s attributes, that He is incessantly working; He granted it to His rational creation. But Satan worked, yet not for the glory of his Creator, but on his own account; his work turned, not for his edification, but for his destruction. “*With your wisdom and your understanding, you have gained riches for yourself, and gathered gold and silver into your treasuries. By your great wisdom in trade, you have increased your riches*” (Ez 28:4, 5). God rejoices to see the treasuries of His creation always full of every precious riches. Yet what made Him sad, is that: “*Your heart is lifted up because of your riches*” (Ez 28:5). Riches are grace and blessing; but lifting up the heart would corrupt that of the rich man, to think of himself as god: “*Because you have set your heart as the heart of a god. Behold, therefore, I will bring strangers against you, the most terrible of nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, and defile your splendor. They shall throw you down into the pit; and you shall die the death of the slain in the midst of the sea*” (Ez 28:6-8). Whatever befalls him is not because of his wisdom, his beauty, or his riches; but because of the pride of his heart; thinking of himself as god, he became deprived of his wisdom, beauty, and riches; and even of life itself.

The fathers spoke much about the importance of work, and the blessing of riches, proclaiming that it is pride that corrupts the work and

¹ PG 33:357A.

the riches. **St. Clement of Alexandria** wrote a book on this subject, under the title “Who is the rich man that is saved?” saying: [We are not to throw riches away; that which could benefit our brothers... Man should not scatter his riches, but should rather destroy his inner lusts, that oppose the right use of riches. By being good and virtuous, man can use his riches properly. So we should understand the Lord’s command to “*Go, sell whatever you have...*” (Mark 10:21); It is forsaking and selling the lusts of our souls¹.]

d- “**Every precious stone was your covering**” (Ez 28:13). These, according to the Septuagint version, are the same twelve precious stones that were put on the breastplate of the high priest; and those adorning the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:19, 20). They refer to the divine virtues and the talents with which God adorns the soul, to bring it into His sanctuaries, beautiful and shining. That is why God comforts His striving Church, saying to her: “*O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted. Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems; and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones... This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me,*’ says the Lord” (Is 54:11-17). God adorns His rational creation with talents and virtues. But if it falls into pride, that will be a cause of judgment upon it.

e- **The fiery nature:** “*You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you. You were on the holy mountain of God*” (Ez 28:14). He set him with a fiery nature, a blazing cherub; and established him in the sanctuaries; so he became with no excuse. God granted us the possibilities of the new nature; and established us in Him “*the holy Mountain.*” Thus we became without excuse before Him.

f- “**You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones**” (Ez 28:16). If he, being a cherub, walked in the midst of the cherubim and the seraphim, the blazing fires, he should have stayed like them, a holy fire, and should not have fallen from among them. The cherubim judge Satan; having been one of them, before he falls! And the apostles as well, will judge the twelve tribes of Israel; for they had been Jews, and accepted faith; but the Jews rejected faith in Christ, the Source of the

¹ للمؤلف: آباء مدرسة الإسكندرية ، 1980 ، ص 68-70.

sanctification and salvation of humanity!

2- A LAMENTATION FOR THE KING OF TYRE

Pride makes the created - in his own eyes - a god: “*Because your heart is lifted up, and you say ‘I am a god’*” (Ez 28:2). That is why you bring him down, to die a horrible death: “*You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of aliens; for I have spoken,’ Thus says the Lord*” (Ez 28:10). The Phoenicians used to practice circumcision¹; and considered him who dies uncircumcised as despised and disgraced! Thus pride would not only kill him, but will bring him into great disgrace!

As to the issue of killing, according to the Septuagint version, it came: “*Therefore I cast you as a profane thing, out of the mountain of God*” (Ez 28:16). **St. Jerome** clarifies to us that the mountain of God out of which the king of Tyre was cast; saying: [The mountain of God is rich in His blessings. This is the mountain that Ezekiel mentioned, on which the king of Tyre was punished².]

The ‘mountain’ refers to the presence of the Savior who incarnated. As in Him the divine nature has indeed dwelt. Indeed, there is no other way, in which the Holy Spirit found His dwelling, instantly and permanently, except in the Savior. And as St. John the Baptist says: “*He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him; This is He...’*” (John 1:33). “*The Lord will dwell in it forever*” (Ps 69:16); in the body that He took from the blessed Mary³. Through this holy mountain, Satan was wounded; In it he did not have a place. Through the Lord Christ, Satan was cast away from humanity.

3- A PROCLAMATION AGAINST SIDON

We have previously spoken of Sidon, as ‘the land of fishing.’ It joined Tyre in mocking Judah concerning its captivity; and became “*a pricking brier and a painful thorn for the house of Israel*” (Ez 28:24); that is why “*the Lord will send pestilence upon her*” (Ez 28:23), to become a painful thorn to her.

Finally, God made it clear that He does all that to gather the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, to be

¹ *Herodotus 2:104.*

² *On Ps. hom 7.*

³ *On Ps. hom 7.*

hallowed in them; to fulfill them, and grant them peace! That is God's persistent longing, to see humanity returning to find comfort in Him, to be fulfilled, and filled with peace, as His holy bride.

A LESSON FROM SATAN!

Satan became a lesson to me!
You created him among the cherubim, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty! Knows much of Your divine mysteries!
But through pride, he fell from heaven to the abyss!
You created me as the most awesome of Your creation on earth.
You granted me mind, wisdom, and beauty!
Grant me the spirit of humility, to be attached to You;
And to enjoy the splendor of Your beauty on me!

You set him in heaven to rejoice for Your presence;
But through his arrogance, he fell down into eternal suffering!
You set me in the Garden of Eden to work and praise!
When will You lift me up to Your Paradise, to enjoy the eternal glory?!

God gave him riches; yet his heart was lifted up because of his riches!
You did not leave me in need for any of Your riches!
When will I acquire You, O my treasure and my riches?!

You are my love! You are my praise! You are my joy, and the happiness of my heart! You are my fulfillment and my riches!
With You, I need nothing!

You adorned him with every precious stone;
But through his rebellion he came to be deprived of everything beautiful and precious!
You adorned me with talents as precious stones; Kindle in me Your talents, as a valuable inheritance!

You created him a fiery cherub. You let him dwell in the sanctuaries.
But through his will, he collapsed to dwell in everlasting fire that will never be quenched!
You renewed me by Your fiery Spirit;
To carry me up to the throne of Your glory; to an unapproachable light!
When will I be like a cherub, and a servant of light!
I am looking forward to Your advent, O the true Light!

CHAPTER 29

PROCLAMATIONS AGAINST THE PHARAOH OF EGYPT

THE FOUR CHAPTERS (29 to 32)

The prophet left the Pharaoh of Egypt to the end, and dedicated four chapters for prophecies and lamentations for the Pharaoh of Egypt, in great abundance, for two reasons: The first was because Egypt has been at that time of huge authority; the prophecy against the Pharaoh of Egypt, carried a prophecy against the pagan world as a whole. The second was because Judah leaned upon the Pharaoh of Egypt, to save him from the hands of the king of Babylon, to end up destroyed. The Pharaoh of Egypt, thus became a symbol of leaning upon human arm, instead of repentance and return to God.

In **chapter 29**, he spoke about the sin of Pharaoh, that of pride.

In **chapter 30**, he prophesied against the Pharaoh of Egypt; his defeat before Babylon.

In **chapter 31**, he likened the Pharaoh of Egypt to the haughty cedar that will be cut off and cast into the abyss.

And in **chapter 32**, he took up a lamentation for the Pharaoh, the monster (the crocodile) that was destroyed by the king of Babylon.

Chapter 29 spoke about:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- Pharaoh, the great monster (crocodile) | 1-7. |
| 2- A temporary chastisement | 8-12. |
| 3- A return and a reform for Egypt | 13-16. |
| 4- He will be delivered to the king of Babylon | 17-21. |

1- PHARAOH THE GREAT MONSTER (CROCODILE)

The prophet Ezekiel fixes the date of this prophecy by the tenth year of captivity; when Pharaoh came with his armies toward Jerusalem to save it from siege. The men of Judah did not listen to the warnings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; and leaned upon the Pharaoh of Egypt against Babylon; rebelled against Babylon. The Pharaoh of Egypt came to save them... This led later to the destruction of the city, and to the killing of many.

God gave a convenient analogy: Tyre, the island that was rich by its trade, proud of its traders. He likened it to a ship, precious in its

construction and cargo, and perfect in its crew and men of war. While the Pharaoh of Egypt, together with his men, who depended upon the River Nile that gave Egypt fertility; He likened him to a great monster (a crocodile) who lies in the midst of his rivers (Ez 29:3); as the River Nile was then famous for its crocodiles.

God called Pharaoh ‘the great monster or crocodile,’ probably because the Egyptians worshipped the crocodiles; so became themselves crocodiles; and their king was called ‘the great crocodile.’ Whoever worships stones, will become a stone; whoever worships vanity, will become vanity; And whoever worships the true God, will become ‘truth,’ and will enjoy the fellowship of the divine nature.

The sin of Tyre was, greedily trying to benefit from the fall of Judah; while the sin of Pharaoh was pride; as, with his mighty army, he thought that he could do anything he wants; he who said: “*My River is my own; I have made it for myself*” (Ez 29:3). It was Pharaoh king of Egypt, Apries or Hophra, of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (588-569), who used to boast that, by his own hands, he realized for himself the power and security. He set the ‘ego’ a god, that made the river, the source of Egypt’s fertility and greatness; made it for her own sake. The Historian Herodotus wrote that this king reigned with great prosperity for 25 years; his success made his heart lifted up, to say that even God Himself could not take him away from his kingdom. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of that pride, saying: “*Who is coming up like a flood, whose waters move like the rivers? Egypt rises up like a flood, and its waters move like rivers. And he says, ‘I will go up and cover the earth; I will destroy the city and its inhabitants’*” (Jer 46:7, 8). How will God deal with such a great monster, which claims that he is the creator of the river on his own account?! He says:

“I will put hooks in your jaws, and cause the fish of your rivers to stick to your scales. I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, and all the fish in your rivers will stick to your scales. I will leave you in the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers. You shall fall on the open field. You shall not be picked up or gathered. I have given you as food to the beasts of the field and to the birds of the heaven” (Ez 29:4, 5).

Having thought with the pride of his heart, that the power and prosperity he is enjoying are his own making, God will deprive him of

those gifts, will bring him out of the midst of his rivers, to let him die like a fish out of the water. And having assumed that everything have been created to serve him, He will cast him out in the wilderness, to die on the open field with no one to care for him, or even to bury him; to become a prey for the wild beasts and to the birds of heaven! And having gathered together around him many people to fight with him or to be under his protection, they will be like fish of the rivers that stick to his scales; whether they are nations, princes, chariots, or armies; all will face the same destiny. So, pride will cause him to lose his riches, his dignity, and even his life; and will humiliate those attached to him and leaning upon him. It is said, that when that Pharaoh came out to fight the people of Libya, who drove out his friend king Aricius, to get him his throne back, the Egyptians rebelled against him in his absence; and prevented him and his princes from returning to his kingdom; So he was cast out with them in the wilderness.

That was the work of pride in Satan, who used to be referred to the highest heavenly rank; who lost heaven through his pride, to fall down to the abyss. Instead of the friendship with God, he entered into animosity against Him; and instead of the heavenly glory, he entered into permanent humiliation; he was destroyed, together with many of his angels, as well as of humans! That was how, our fore parents fell from Paradise, were deprived of their permanent existence in the divine presence; and gave their descendents an inheritance of labor and suffering! We were driven out of the River of life; and cast away to the wilderness of this life, to die spiritually, and to become a spoil to the beasts of the field (the devils of oppression and fierceness), and to the birds of heaven (the devil of pride).

Again He likened the Pharaoh of Egypt to a staff of reed to the house of Israel (Ez 29:6). He is like a staff, yet of reed, that if someone leans on it, it will break, and tear his shoulder. Instead of supporting him, it would destroy his energies; according to the words of the prophet Isaiah: *“For the Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose. Therefore I have called her, ‘Rahab-Hem-Shebeth (Rahab the do-nothing)’”* (Is 30:7). The Pharaoh of Egypt encouraged king Zedekiah to rebel against Babylon, to betray the covenant, and break the oath; that led to the fall of Zedekiah, the destruction of Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah, together with the defeat of Pharaoh himself.

It is to be noticed here, that chastening Pharaoh and the fish sticking to his scales, was by leaving them in the wilderness, to be eaten by the beasts of the field and the birds of heaven; the worst way to die, as far as the Egyptians are concerned, who used to keep the corpses of the dead in secure tombs and tunnels, so that when the spirits return, they would again enter their bodies!

2- A TEMPORARY CHASTISEMENT

When Pharaoh, in the pride of his heart, assumed that he is the maker of the great River, and the protector of the surrounding nations; God brought a sword against him, to uproot men and beasts. Through pride, man would lose his humanity 'his intellectual life,' as well as his animality 'his earthly life;' he would lose what relate to both his body and mind. As to the limit of this loss, it is an utter waste and desolation, that extends from 'Migdol' in the north, to 'Syene' in the south (Esswan), as far as the border of 'Cush' (Ez 29:9).

'**Migdol**' is a Semite name meaning "tower;" probably a fortified city on the north-east border of Egypt, toward Palestine; which is nowadays 'Tell-El-Her,' 12 miles west of Pelusium; on the way crossed by the Hebrews as they came out of Egypt.

'**Aswan**' (Sewen, or Syene), is on the east bank of the River, on the southern border of Egypt; faced on the west bank by the island of Elephantine, that was a source of Granite for sculpturing the Egyptian statues; as well as a stronghold on the southern border of Egypt.

'**Cush,**' on the other hand, is 'Ethiopia;' but here, it is most probably the 'Nubian' land.

Thus the chastisement of the Pharaoh of Egypt was an utter one, his land will become desolate, with no inhabitant, man or beast; from north to south. Yet it was, at the same time, of temporary nature (40 years), contrary to those of other nations, whose chastisements were to be eternal. He scatters the Egyptians, yet for a certain time; probably a reference to the special place that the land of Egypt would eventually occupy in the heart of God; when it comes to believe in the Lord Christ; according to the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah: "*Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come to Egypt... Then the Lord will be known to Egypt; and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day; and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the Lord and*

perform it” (Is 19).

Egypt will spend the days of its idolatry as though lost in the wilderness; then to return to faith in God, and to worship of its Savior.

3- A RETURN AND A REFORM FOR EGYPT

God gave a lesson to the Pharaoh of Egypt, who provoked the king of Judah to disregard the voice of prophets; to end up together with his people, scattered for a period of 40 years; after which, *God brought back the captives of Egypt, and caused them to return to the land of ‘Pathros,’ to the land of their origin; and they shall be a lowly kingdom” (Ez 29:14).*

‘**Pathros**’ is an Egyptian word that means “the land of the south” - Upper Egypt -that was of less importance and fame than Lower or Middle Egypt. It is to be noticed that, after Nebuchadnezzar took over Jerusalem, some Hebrews came to dwell in Pathros (Jer 44:1, 2, 15).

By the kingdom’s return to Pathros, he probably implied its weakness and helplessness to fight or to help others any more; it would not resume its pride; or its deception of the people of God, pretending to be their support against Babylon.

4- HE IS DELIVERED TO THE KING OF BABYLON

Finally, instead of defending Judah, the Pharaoh of Egypt fell into the hand of the king of Babylon, who confiscated his riches; and took him a spoil. God delivered him to the king of Babylon, as a reward for what the latter did to Tyre. When Tyre came to benefit from the tribulation of Jerusalem; God provoked Babylon to destroy it, and then rewarded it by the riches of Pharaoh. Nebuchadnezzar attacked the land of Egypt in the thirty-seventh year of his reign (568-567 B C); and got much of its wealth; yet did not affiliate it to his kingdom.

The main issue for which God cared, was not to reward the king of Babylon for destroying Tyre that rejoiced for the tribulation of Jerusalem; but to “*cause the horn (namely the strength) of the house of Israel to spring forth* “ (Ez 29:21); and to open the mouth of His prophet to speak in the midst of His people, to proclaim that salvation, with the spirit of hope and joy; saying: “*I will open your mouth to speak in their midst. Then they shall know that I am their Lord*” (Ez 29:21).

**MY RIVER IS MY OWN
I HAVE MADE IT FOR MYSELF!**

The Pharaoh of Egypt is proud of the River Nile;
He counts it as his own; made by his hands for himself!
How ridiculous for man to refer to himself what is actually God's.
Instead of offering thanksgiving and praise to God, for creating the
world for him;
he thinks of being a god himself!

You have chastened Egypt, yet for a certain time;
Then came to it over a swift cloud!
You devastated its idols, and set Your altar in its midst!

Hasten to my soul, O Savior!
Let the idols of my soul tremble before Your presence!
Set Your divine altar inside me!

Cast away my ingratitude; and teach me thanksgiving!
The River Nile is of the making of Your own hands!
Your gifts are uncountable!
How shall I pay You back, O Lord, for the abundance of Your gifts?!

CHAPTER 30

PHARAOH'S FALL BEFORE BABYLON

In this chapter He spoke of the defeat of the Pharaoh of Egypt, who assumed that he is capable of helping Judah. His defeat was on a universal level: broken down psychologically, his wealth was scattered; and finally his arms were broken..

- 1- The psychological break down of Pharaoh 1-9.
- 2- The destruction of Pharaoh's wealth 10-19.
- 3- Breaking of Pharaoh's arms 20-26.

1- THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BREAK DOWN OF PHARAOH

When God commanded the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy against the Pharaoh of Egypt, He did not call Pharaoh to wail, nor did He call all the people of Egypt to wail; but He made it a general call to the pagan world as a whole; The Pharaoh of Egypt being its representative at that time; He said: "Woe, Woe to the day" (Ez 30:2). And the day of the fall of Pharaoh, or that of the land of Egypt, is called, "*The day of the Lord;*" as it is a day of chastisement by the Lord to all nations! That is why He said: "*I made the nations shake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to hell together with those who descend into the Pit*" (Ez 31:16). "*They (the kings of many nations) shall tremble every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of your fall*"(Ez 32:10). So will the sound of his fall resonate in the whole world; and the whole creation shall tremble.

It is noteworthy that Pharaoh here refers to Satan, who provokes people to rebel against the prophetic words; who assumes that he has the authority to support many. We previously spoke of Pharaoh as a symbol of Satan, in our interpretation of the book of Exodus, concerning his opposition to the prophet Moses and to Aaron. And as **Origen** says: [I believe that certain names of peoples or kings we read about in the Holy Bible, actually apply to the wicked angels, or to the adversary princes, as for example the Pharaoh of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and to the king of Assyria¹.]

¹ In Num. Homily 11:4.

If Pharaoh - as a symbol of Satan - thinks of himself as one of authority, to whom other nations come to seek refuge and protection, God proclaims his psychological defeat, and his destruction through fear. He made his day, "*a day of clouds*" (Ez 30:3). Clouds as we already know are a sign of the divine glory; covering the holy mountain, the holy tabernacle, or the holy temple; as a proclamation of man's entry into unseen incomprehensible mysteries. Yet, as far as Satan or as Pharaoh are concerned, clouds represent a state of darkness, through which either one cannot, or do not know how to act. If he saw himself as a leader; in the darkness he stumbles together with all those who follow him or take refuge under his wings. That is why the Lord says: "*On that day messengers shall go forth from Me in ships, to make the careless Ethiopians afraid. And great anguish shall come upon them. As on the day of Egypt; For indeed it is coming*" (Ez 30:9). The nearest country to him is Cush, that probably meant 'Nubia,' or some regions of Asia. Anyhow, if terror filled the heart of Pharaoh as well as the nearest country to him, that was under his protection, what would be the destiny of the other countries that are far away from him?! It was God Himself who terrified them: "*Messengers shall go forth from Me in ships, to make the careless Ethiopia (Cush) afraid;*" because it forsook the Lord and took refuge in Pharaoh.

By the terror and the fall of Pharaoh, "*Ethiopia (Cush), Put, Lud, all the mingled people, Chub, and the men of the lands who are allied, shall fall with them by the sword*" (Ez 30:5).

We have previously dealt with Cush, Put, and Lud (Ez 27:10). As to '*All the mingled people,*' this is interpreted by some as the mingled people and by others as the people of Arabia.

Chub is believed by some to be 'Lob or Libya;' people who dwelt in northeast of Africa. In the Septuagint version, it came as "the people of the land of the covenant;" meaning the countries that entered with Pharaoh into a covenant to protect them, especially against the attacks of the king of Babylon.

The pride of the devil had to be totally destroyed in all his kingdom, from Migdol at the far north to Syene at the far south (Ez 30:6); and with him all his followers and all who take refuge under his wings: "*Then they will know that I am the Lord; when I have set a fire in Egypt, and all her helpers are destroyed*" (Ez 30:8).

2- THE DESTRUCTION OF PHARAOH'S WEALTH

Instead of pride and arrogance, fear and terror filled Pharaoh and all the surrounding nations and those under his protection. Instead of his riches and wealth that made him say: *"My river is my own; I have made it for myself"* (Ez 29:3, 9), God says: *"I will make the rivers dry"* (Ez 30:12). Instead of his kingdom and authority, God will deliver his land into the hands of aliens (Ez 30:12). And Instead of comfort and peace, God will set a fire, and his kingdom will lose its hope; as its young men fall by the sword; and its daughters go into captivity! He who thought of himself as a god, will have his idols and images destroyed (Ez 30:13).

The kingdom of the devil had to come to an end; his false dignity had to be wiped out; all his capabilities had to collapse; and he had to be cast away in the eternal fire, together with all who followed him, and those who took refuge in him.

All the centers of power that worked in his service and under his authority, shall be destroyed; those that were symbolized by the following fortified Egyptian cities, the most important of which are:

a- **Noph:** *"Thus says the Lord God: 'I will destroy the idols, and cause the images to cease from Noph. There shall no longer be princes from the land of Egypt'"* (Ez 30:13). When He intended to talk about the destruction of all the authority of Pharaoh (the symbol of Satan); and the end of his kingdom, from which no longer princes will come, He chose 'Noph,' a Hebrew name of the Egyptian 'Meniphi or Meniphri;' or 'Memphis' in Greek; the most famous city in old Egypt; built by king 'Mina' when he unified the north and south provinces; and made it the capital of his kingdom; with no equal in size or importance, except for 'Thebes;' not until the Greeks built the city of 'Alexandria' as their capital.

Memphis was 10 miles south of Cairo, close to 'Mit-Rahina;' and in it, or close to it, royal palaces were established; as well as the pyramids, 12 miles south of it; in which kings were buried. Once Alexandria was built, 'Memphis retreated to the second place; had been densely inhabited until the Arabs came to Egypt and destroyed it completely. The growth of Fostat then Cairo went hand in hand with the destruction of Memphis; whose bricks were used to build them.

The calf Apis was worshipped in Memphis, as a symbol of the principal god Pta or god of the fire.

b- **Pathros** (Ez 30:14): We already said that it was the land of the south, or Upper Egypt. As God destroyed the idols in Noph in Lower Egypt, He did the same to those of Upper Egypt.

c- **Zoan** (Ez 30:14): On the eastern bank of the Delta; built seven years after Hebron (Num 13:22). Psalm 78:12, 43 referred to Zoan as the location where the miracles connected to the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, took place; and also mentioned in Isaiah 19:11, 13; 30:4; probably as being the capital of Egypt. It was known by the name of Avaris, as the capital of the Hyksos, neglected after they were driven out, then restored to importance in the days of Sati the First, and Raamses the Second (Exod 1:11); Its Greek name was Tanis; and nowadays it is called 'Sa- El-Hagar.'

d- **No**: God says, "*I will cut off the multitude of No*" (Ez 30:15). 'No, No-Amon, or Amon-No,' is an Egyptian name, meaning "the city of Amon," the greatest Egyptian god, especially from the seventeenth dynasty onwards. (The Egyptian word 'Amon' means the hidden or concealed, and in Hebrew it means "Amen or the Maker").

Amon-No or Thebes was located in Upper Egypt, 400 miles south of Memphis, on the banks of the Nile. The Pharaoh Ahmes gave it great importance by driving out the Hyksos, liberating Egypt, and reuniting it. He set the cornerstone of the Egyptian empire, established by the two dynasties 18 and 19. His successors took care of the city that grew in greatness and magnificence. It had 100 gates; and its priest - the priest of Amon - was considered as the second man in the nation. Even after Memphis became later on the capital of Egypt, Thebes kept its importance because of the worship of the god Amon, and all that it followed it of great temples, buildings, and obelisks. In the seventh century B.C., when Esar-haddon the Syrian conqueror, came to it in the year 671 B. C, then his son Assur-Bani-pal in the year 664 B. C, and occupied it (Nahum 3:8), they did not utterly destroy it. Yet when Egypt led the rebellion against the authority of the Roman empire, the Roman armies destroyed it, and turned it into heaps of ruins. The magnificent remains in regions of Luxor, Karnack, Korna, Hepo, the tombs of the kings, and Dir-El-Bahari etc., still testify before the whole world, to the greatest civilization in history.

e- **Sin**: "*I will pour My fury on Sin, the strength of Egypt*" (Ez 30:15). "*Sin shall have great pain*" (Ez 30:16). It was the only city that

was placed under the Assyrian authority; undoubtedly set at the location of Pelusium, to keep the gate of Egypt open before the Assyrian king. It was called the 'Stronghold of Egypt;' because at it, several battles took place. At its location is nowadays 'Tell Farama,' 20 miles north east of the city of 'Kantara.'

f- **Aven:** "*The young men of Aven and Pi-Beseth shall fall by the sword, and these cities shall go into captivity*" (Ez 30:17) The city of O-Aven, Eno in Egyptian, and Heliopolis in Greek; was the seat of the god 'Ra,' the god of the Sun. Nowadays it is 'Tel Hassan' or 'Ein-Shams,' 7 miles north east of Cairo; where Joseph's father-in-law dwelt (Gen 41:45, 50). Its temple has been of great importance. It was beloved by the kings; and its priests were the most educated; That is why there was a tradition that Plato and other Greek philosophers studied in Heliopolis.

It is as though God intended to proclaim that the young men of such educated city would fall by the sword; as knowledge without faith does not edify the soul.

g- **Pi-Beseth:** An Egyptian name, meaning "the house of the goddess Basht," 'Bubastos' in Greek. Nowadays it is called 'Tel-Basta,' close to the city of 'Zagazig' east of the Delta.

h- **Tehaphnehes:** "*At Tehaphnehes the day shall also be darkened, when I break the yokes of Egypt there. And her arrogant strength shall cease in her*" (Ez 30:18). It was the city in which some Jews took refuge, as they fled to Egypt after 'Gedaliah' was killed (Jer 43:7). In Greek it is called Daphnai; and nowadays it is Tel-Dephenna, 10 miles west of 'kantara.' In the Septuagint version, it came as Tahpanhes, meaning (the stronghold or fortress of Penahse). 'Penahse' was most probably a prince of great authority from Thebes, who lived in the eleventh century B.C.; and led a revolution in the north; many cities were named after him.

The historian 'Herodotus' mentioned that 'Tahpanhes' has been an Egyptian fortress on the Asian side; before the Greeks took it over. Among its remains were found, many Greek potteries, iron weapons, and iron and bronze arrow heads, that carried Greek nature; beside several items that indicate that it has been a very important commercial route.

3- BREAKING OF PHARAOH'S ARMS

After showing how Pharaoh's fortified cities were destroyed, he started talking about how his arms were broken beyond healing, that he was no more capable of holding a sword to defend himself or those who leaned upon his protection. At the same time God strengthened the arms of the king of Babylon; and put His sword in his hand, to chasten Pharaoh, whose arms fell down, and whose people were scattered among the nations, and dispersed throughout the countries!

That is a portrait of the work of the devil that opposes the divine ordinances; it will end up with utter failure; even if it appears successful at the beginning!

A FIRE IN THE CITY OF FIRE!

In Memphis, the Egyptians worshipped the god 'Pta' in the city of fire!

Pharaoh thought that he is the fiery man!

A man of authority, in whom the nations take refuge!

Here, God turns Pharaoh's day into a cloudy day,
a day of darkness and fear.

He was psychologically broken down; and terror prevailed in all Egypt!

God kindles the fire of His chastisement;
to break down all the energies of Pharaoh!

Instead of protecting others, he becomes himself terrified!

He loses his wealth and his arms are broken!

Teach me, O Lord, the spirit of humility!

You are a refuge for me and for my brothers!

We are all in need for Your protection and care;

O, You, the prudent Shepherd of souls!

CHAPTER 31

LAMENTATION OF THE CEDAR TREE

He prophesied about Tyre, presenting it like a ship, precious in its construction and cargo; with excellent crew and men of war; that was lost in the midst of the seas, and sank with its cargo to the depths; mourned for by those working on it, and trading with it; and became an example to all the other ships. Now here, as he prophesies about the Pharaoh of Egypt, he presents to us the high Cedar tree, whose top reaches up to the clouds; and among its thick boughs the birds of heaven build their nests, and under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young... that, which will likewise collapse and fall. This tree, according to the Septuagint version, is Assyria, as though He presents to Pharaoh a practical example before him - the nation of Assyria that collapsed, to be replaced by the Babylonian empire. Some scholars believe that He is talking about Pharaoh himself, as the high Cedar tree. Anyhow, this example equally applies to both the haughty Pharaoh of Egypt, and to Assyria before him; and it applies as well to every haughty and arrogant soul.

1- The haughty cedar tree 1-9.

2- The fall of the cedar tree 10-18.

1- THE HAUGHTY CEDAR TREE

God commands the prophet Ezekiel to ask the Pharaoh of Egypt; saying: *“Whom are you in your greatness? Indeed Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, with fine branches that shaded the forest, and of high stature. And its top was among the thick boughs”* (Ez 31:2, 3).

If He is rebuking the Pharaoh of Egypt, who feels great in his own eyes, because of the gifts and talents granted to him by God; or if He presents to him as an example, Assyria that carried the same attribute, ‘the pride.’ This portrait presented, also applies to man, on whom God poured all possibilities of success, who, instead of glorifying God, he fell into pride, and so collapsed. This is a lamentation for every soul, that resembles the one presented to the king of Tyre, as a symbol of Satan, whom God had set above all heavenly and earthly creation; a cherub who, in His Paradise, carried the divine throne; and from whom He kept no secret. Yet, as he got proud, he fell.

Some believe that God requests of Pharaoh to think about Assyria, the great kingdom that fell. In the year 609 B.C., Pharaoh Necho came to Carchemish to help the Assyrian empire that was facing the attacks of Babylon. But his efforts failed; and Assyria was wiped out from history, like an uprooted cedar tree.

And now, what did God grant us?

The Lord summarized His gifts to us in three things:

a- *“Indeed Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon”*(Ez 31:3). Assyria was the greatest nation in those days; like a high cedar tree; its king was the greatest among all the kings surrounding him, and they submitted to him.

God created us as the most perfect creation on earth; in the sixth day after He prepared everything for our comfort. He granted us a rational soul, in His image and according to His likeness. He gave us the authority over all the earthly creation. He intended, not to humiliate man, but to exalt him; not to deprive him, but to fulfill him; not to set him a helpless tool in His hand, but a being with free will. He exalted him to the greatest length.

“It was beautiful in greatness and in the length of its branches... The cedars in the garden of God, the fir trees were not like its boughs; and the chestnut trees were not like its branches. No tree in the garden of God was like it in beauty. I made it beautiful with a multitude of branches; so that all the trees of Eden envied it, that were in the garden of God”(Ez 31:7-9). Man is God’s plant, made by His own hands, He planted him in His garden; and made him more beautiful than all the trees of His garden. Satan envied him because of the splendor that God poured on him; and provoked him to pride and haughtiness toward God!

b- *“With fine branches”* (Ez 31:3). Satan envied him because of the multitude of his branches (Ez 31:9); as: *“All the birds of heavens made their nests in its boughs; under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young; and in its shadow all great nations made their home”* (Ez 31:6).

He likens the nations that were submitted to Assyria, to birds that take refuge in its boughs; and to the beasts of the field that bring forth their young under its branches.

What are these multitude of beautiful branches, granted by God

to protect the bird of heaven, and under whose shadow the beasts of the field bring forth their young, but the nature of love that God created in man, to extend with his heart to all mankind, and even to every earthly creation. In him, saints would find comfort; and in him, the afflicted would find refuge; and find in him a heart spacious enough, to accommodate many. God created man as a being, beloved and loving; the object of the love of God and His angels, and his heart is widened too to love.

Indeed Assyria so extended by its might, to embrace many nations under its authority, including the Pharaoh of Egypt. But the children of God extend by their true inner love, to be able, if possible, to love even the adversaries and the wicked; so that all would find their comfort in them.

c- He planted it on rivers of abundant water: *“The waters made it grow; underground water s gave it height; with their rivers running around the place it was planted; and sent out rivulets to all the trees of the field”* (Ez 31:4). If the abundant waters of the Nile gave Pharaoh riches and wealth, and supported his greatness; and he got fulfilled, and even flowed over the nations around him, *“sending out rivulets of water to all the trees of the field;”* in this he also simulates Assyria, that depended on the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. And Yet Assyria fell!

As far as we are concerned as believers; we have to apply this to the work of God’s grace in us. As we are planted on the holy waters of Baptism, and get fulfilled internally by the Holy Spirit, that grants us uprightness, for our stature to reach the clouds, and for our branches to extend in every direction; That will even be reflected on others, to accept the work of the Spirit in them; to get aflame with its fire, the same way we do; and to get to enjoy the work of the holy Baptism, when they feel its activity in us.

If the high stature of the cedar tree to reach up to the clouds (Ez 31:3), refers to the life of perfection and sanctification that God granted to man, by which he enters into the mysteries of the kingdom, and beholds the hidden divine glories; and if the multitude of branches refers to the power of love, to accommodate all; both - sanctification and love - are the gifts of the Holy Spirit that work in us through the water of the holy Baptism; saying: *“Therefore its height was exalted above all the trees of the field; Its boughs were multiplied, and its branches became*

long because of the abundance of water, as it sent them out” (Ez 31:5). In the water of Baptism, we grow as a new branch in the true Vine; by the divine Spirit we will continuously grow upward, and by the multitude of branches, we shall extend horizontally.

That is why **St. Isaac the Syrian** says: [If you get good, apparently or secretly, you should be sure that Baptism and faith, are the intermediaries to this good; as by them, you were invited to good works in Christ Jesus¹.]

Fr. Methodius says: [Those who get enlightened by the features of Christ... on everyone of them, will be printed the shape, image, and features of the ‘Word;’ that Christ would be counted as born in each of them, through the work of the Holy Spirit... And those baptized would become other christs².]

And **St. Jacob of Serug** says in a work on Baptism: [Baptism will get your name written up there in heaven; in the Church of the firstborns; and you would become a son of God the Father, who sits in the highs.]

As such the true believer would have the spiritual beauty, exaltation, power, and love... to surpass and be envied by the other trees.

2- THE FALL OF THE CEDAR TREE

The book of Ezekiel concentrates on the sin of pride as the cause of falling. It says here: *“Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have increased in height, and it set its top among the thick boughs, and its heart was lifted up in its height; therefore I will deliver it into the hand of the mighty one of the nations, and he shall surely deal with it; I have driven it out for its wickedness”* (Ez 31:10, 11). God longed to see his stature exalted to reach the clouds; yet as his heart exalted through haughtiness, he fell down from among the clouds. There are many, whose spiritual statures have exalted, and entered into the hidden mysteries of God, yet they kept their humble heart, like what happened with St. Mary, who praised God, saying: *“He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly”* (Luke 1:52). That is why the Church Fathers warned us against pride and vainglory; and provoked us to adopt humility.

¹ A.J. Wensinch: *Mystical Treatises, St. Isaac the Syrian, p. 7.*

² *Conirrum virinum, (Ench patr n 613).*

St. John Climacus says: [Humility is the heavenly ladder capable of exalting the soul from the pit of iniquities to heaven.] [If the pride of some angels has turned them into demons (Is 14) humility, undoubtedly, can make out of demons (the falling souls), angels; thus those who fell should be encouraged¹.]

The fruits of pride and its works in us are:

a- Pride has humiliated Assyria and subjected it to Babylon; and so it did to the Pharaoh of Egypt: “*And aliens, the most terrible of the nations, have cut it down*” (Ez 31:12). While the grace of God would forsake the proud man, to become a prey to the devils; and to be cut off by terrible enemies; a humble man, on the other hand, would be supported by the grace of God; to him the beasts of the field would be subjected; and he would reign over the earth. That is why it is said: “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Mat 5:5).

b- It does not stop at the devils’ agitation against him, but he would also lose his own inner features that are given him: “*Its branches have fallen on the mountains and in all the valleys. Its boughs lie broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the people of the earth have gone from under its shadow and left it*” (Ez 31:12). This is a bitter portrait of the soul; its perdition is not a result of an outer war, but of an inner death. Its dried up boughs fall down, and lose all vitality wherever they are: either on the high mountains or in the deep valleys; in the wilderness or by the rivers. Corruption would come from within him, whatever the circumstances are; to become without branches, barren and dry, giving shade to no one, and no man finds rest in him, and left lonely.

St. John Chrysostom wrote several articles about this issue, proclaiming that no one can harm man unless he harms himself. By pride man would destroy his life, even when he refers his failure to the circumstances prevailing around him, or to the people dealing with him. The fault is actually in the tree that carries its dryness, and not in the mountains, the valleys, the rivers, or the peoples who forsook it.

c- Instead of having the birds of heaven come to get comfort among its branches; and the beasts of the field to give forth their young under their shade, it is said: “*On its ruin (the fallen tree) will remain all*

¹ Ladder 25:68, 63.

the birds of the heavens; and all the beasts of the field will come to its branches” (Ez 31:13). The tree turned into useless ruin, on which birds would sit in despire, and to which the beasts of the field would come as though to a desolate place. The soul would be carrying the birds of heaven; namely, the spirits of haughtiness and arrogance; and would be carrying the beasts of the field; namely, the spirit of violence, ferocity and animality.

d- It would fall down to the abyss; to become a lesson for the other trees: *“So that no trees by the waters may ever again exalt themselves for their height... For they have all been delivered to death, to the depths of the earth, among the children of men who go down to the pit” (Ez 31:14).*

e- Man would lose his joy; and he and those surrounding him would enter into mourning: *“In the day it went down to hell, I caused mourning. I covered the deep because of it. I restrained its rivers, and the great waters were held back. I caused Lebanon to mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted because of it. I made the nations shake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to hell”(Ez 31:15, 16).*

The soul loses the source of its joy; being deprived of the rivers of the holy grace, and of the living waters; it would be mourned for by the other souls that would also tremble with fear for themselves, having partaken of its sins.

f- He ended His talk about the destiny of the proud by saying: *“You shall lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those slain by the sword”(Ez 31:18). He would end up, not only by the terrible death, slain by the sword, but he shall lie in the midst of the uncircumcised; namely the unclean. As though he not only loses his life here on earth, by that most horrible death, slain by the sword; but he would also lose his other life, being counted among the unclean.*

So all greatness and glory would be lost; and the soul would be deprived of the fruit of divine grace that was granted free to it! This is the work of pride!

UPROOT PRIDE OUT OF ME!

Pharaoh did not learn from the example of the Assyrian king;

the mighty cedar tree;
That was left fallen on the ground.
Instead of having the birds of heaven and the beasts of the field taking
refuge under its branches; It became dry and of no use!

Uproot pride out of me, O Teacher of humility!
Teach me how to be planted in Your Paradise, by Your grace;
And how to carry the true fruit of the Spirit!

I confess my sin and admit my weakness to You.
And thank You for the riches of Your grace in my life!
Every goodness in me, is from You, the Beneficent!

CHAPTER 32

A LAMENTATION FOR PHARAOH AND FOR EGYPT

He ended his prophecies on the Pharaoh of Egypt by a bitter lamentation for him, and by another for his multitude who fell by the sword among the uncircumcised; His mighty men collapsed together with the nations that leaned on him.

- 1- A lamentation for the Pharaoh of Egypt 1-10 .
- 2- A lamentation for Pharaoh's multitudes 11-16.
- 3- A lamentation for Pharaoh together with the nations 17-32.

1- A LAMENTATION FOR THE PHARAOH OF EGYPT

The final lamentation started for Pharaoh, followed for his multitude, then for the nations following his example or leaning on him. This lamentation came two months after the prophet and the captives got the news of the occupation of Jerusalem.

The lamentation started as such: *"He said to him: 'You are like a young lion among the nations, And you are like a monster (crocodile) in the seas'"*(Ez 32:2). He thought of himself as a lion protecting the nations against the king of Babylon. And he did not realize that he is just a crocodile confined within his river; who is not capable of coming out of Egypt to save Jerusalem or any other nation from the hand of the king of Babylon. Assuming that he is capable of saving, he provoked the king of Judah; yet when Jerusalem was besieged, he could not save it. He turned out as one who troubles the water with his feet; he would not have rest, and would not let others have rest. This is *"the great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers"* (Ez 32:2).

In chapter 29, the great monster boasted saying: *"The river is mine and, I have made it"* (Ez 29:3, 9). That haughty spirit did not only destroy that monster, but also destroyed the fish that stuck to his scales. He burst forth with the rivers of his pride over the rivers of others, and troubled their waters with his feet (Ez 32:2). That is why his judgment became great and bitter, that brought death also to others. God spread His net to draw in it that monster together with the fish (the many nations) that follow his lead, or those sticking to his scales (32:3; 29:4).

The Lord's chastisements are:

a- He again mentions the same punishment that came in chapter 29. He will bring him out of the midst of his rivers, the object of his pride and haughtiness; He will cast him on the dry ground to die together with the fish stuck to him; and will let him be prey to the birds of heaven and the beasts of the field.

b- That monster, having been proud of his river, and what it brings of flood that gives fertility to the land, and riches to his person. Instead of the flood of water, *"God will water the land with the flow of the monster's blood, even to the mountains, and the riverbeds will be full of it"* (Ez 32:6). Pride will turn the water into a flow of the blood of the proud, that carries a smell of death that will disgust everyone: the high mountains and the low riverbeds. Instead of the words of boasting that would draw many to take refuge in him, the smell of death would come out to disgust everyone from him.

c- Losing its blood, that great monster will be transformed into a corrupt corpse cast on the mountains and in the waterbeds. After assuming to be the support for others, he turns into a corrupt burden, something that all wish to get rid of. God will turn him and those around him into captives in countries they have not known (Ez 32:9).

d- It will not stop at his perdition, and that of the nations under his protection; at turning the water of the river into deadly blood; at turning him into a corrupt corpse, that the mountains and waterbeds wish to get rid of. But the activity of his pride will reach up to the sun, the moon, and the other stars; being said: *"When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven I will make dark over you, and bring darkness on your land," Says the Lord God* (Ez 32:7, 8).

It is a bitter portrait of the sign of the end, as proclaimed by the Lord Christ Himself (Mat 24:29), and of the signs of the antichrist (Rev 8:12). It is as though the judgment of the proud man, is but a pledge of the great tribulation, and a shadow of the era of the antichrist!

What are these heavens that its light is covered, but man's loss of every heavenly thought, and every taste of the eternal life?! What are these stars that darken, but the inner spiritual energies and the senses of

the body?! Instead of being the cause of inner enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, it turns into a source of darkness and perdition of the soul. Covering the sun with clouds, implies that the soul will see her Christ - the Sun of Righteousness - no more, to give her light. The moon not giving its light, implies that the Church life with its worship and preaching, will have no more effect on man. As to the land on which darkness prevails, that is the body of man, instead of being a holy temple, enlightened by the Lord, it would become a place for darkness.

In short, pride would utterly destroy man; would let him lose Christ, Sun of Righteousness Sun of Righteousness; and the Church, the shining moon. It would destroy his inner energies, corrupt his heart and body; and darken all his thoughts. Heaven and earth, would become dark to him; the sun and the moon would be as though they do not exist; and the stars would fall down in him.

e- Before that overall desolation of the soul and the body, as well as of the mind and the heart, a state of terror and trembling would prevail over the other nations and their kings: *“Yes, I will make many peoples astonished at you, and their kings shall be horribly afraid of you when I brandish my sword before them; and they shall tremble every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of your fall”* (Ez 32:10). The perdition of the proud terrifies the hearts of sinners; as they feel that their judgment drew near.

2-A LAMENTATION FOR PHARAOH’S MULTITUDE

Chastisement will not stop at Pharaoh, but will reach to his multitude, which would fall by the swords of mighty warriors like the king of Babylon. The pride of Pharaoh, his multitudes, and even his animals will shake.

If Pharaoh represents the proud soul, his multitude represent the energies of the soul, that work for either its edification or for its destruction. Its animals refer to the body with its senses and energies. Perdition will cover man with all the possibilities of both his soul and body.

As to the abundant waters that dry up; these are God’s graces and free gifts, withdrawn by God from the proud soul.

3- A LAMENTATION FOR PHARAOH TOGETHER WITH THE NATIONS

At the end of that prophecy against Pharaoh and his multitude, He included in the lamentation for him, “*the daughters of the famous nations*” (Ez 32:18); that should also be mourned for; as all of them have fallen to the lower parts of the earth together with those going down to the pit. By those daughters, He probably meant the nations that were affiliated to Pharaoh, his army, and his authority; in a bond like that between women and their men, seeking their protection.

It is the destiny of the multitude of nations, to go down to the lower parts of the earth, to the pit, slain among the circumcised. This expression was repeated often in this section (Ez 32:19, 25, 27, 29, 30, 31). After being mighty, feared and respected in the land of the living, they were slain and cast down with their uncleanness (uncircumcised), to the pit.

He presented to Pharaoh and his multitude, living examples of great nations, that were mighty in the land of the living, then ended up slain by the sword and cast among the uncircumcised down to the pit; like Assyria (Ez 32:22), Elam (Ez 32:24, Mashech and Tubal (Ez 32:26), Edom (Ez 32:29), and all the Sidonians (Ez 32:30).

We talked before about those nations or kingdoms, except for Elam, that refers to Elam the son of Shem (Gen 10:22). In the days of Abraham, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, led the kings of the east in invading the Jordan (Gen 14:1-11). That kingdom extended beyond the River Tigris, east of the kingdom of Babylon; south of Assyria, and Media; north of the Persian Gulf; and west to Persia. Its capital was Shushan (Susa, Shusan); hence the Elamites were called Shushanites. In the eighth century B.C., the kings of Assyria conquered Elam, and hired its men in their army; to attack Jerusalem (Is 22). The Persians connected it to their empire; and in recognition of its importance, they made Shushan their capital (Dan 8:2). The Elamites were among the peoples that were carried to Samaria to inhabit it after the captivity of Judah. And when the Jews returned from captivity, it was the remnants of those immigrants who opposed the idea of rebuilding the temple anew (Ezra 4:9). Around the year 200 B.C., the Elamites regained their power, and certain of their kings seized on cities in Babylon. Nowadays Elam is a part of Persia, by the name Khorestan.

**MAKE ME A CUB,
AND NOT A CROCODILE!**

Pharaoh wore the skin of a cub to protect nations;
Yet he was a crocodile who devoured the nations around him like fish!

With an arrogant spirit, he claimed that it was him who made the Nile of
Egypt by his own hands;
and did not realize that through his pride, his feet troubled the water of
the Nile.

He neither rested, nor left the nations around him to rest!

Because of him heaven made its stars dark;
and darkness was brought upon the land.
His soul (heaven) got corrupted; so also his body (earth)!

O Lord, let me be a cub;
A son of You, You the Lion who comes from the tribe of Judah!
Grant me humility; so as not to trouble the water of grace in my heart!
Let Your light shine in me, O the Sun of Righteousness!
Let my soul be enlightened like a new heaven!
Let my body be sanctified like a new earth!

THE FIFTH SECTION

PROPHECIES ABOUT THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

EZEKIEL 33 - 39

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BLESSED FUTURE

With the start of the blessed preparations, through the destruction of the outer enemy, symbolized by Satan; it had to be accompanied by inner change. Instead of being the "rebellious house," they should become "His people." The transformation started with the appearance of someone who had escaped from Jerusalem (Ez 33:21), who came to inform them about its capture and desolation. Here, started the promises of reform, of return, and of rebuilding the new temple; through the true inner repentance, the acceptance of the salvation care of God; and the commitment of every believer to his personal responsibility for his own behavior.

CHAPTER 33

REPENTANCE AS THE BEGINNING OF REFORM

Entering into a new series of prophecies, he confirms his sensitive situation as a watchman, set by God to be honest to proclaim the word, the warnings, the commandments, and the promises of God; whether anyone will listen to him or not. And having felt, being responsible for them, that the spirit of despair has got into them, he started in this chapter to proclaim to them the ‘Gospel of hope,’ confirming that repentance is a possible way, and within our hands, to enjoy the divine reform in us.

- 1- The responsibility of the prophet as a watchman 1-9.
- 2- We should not despair, God is merciful 10--11.
- 3- God will not judge us for our past 12-20.
- 4- Comparing themselves to Abraham 21-29.
- 5- A return from the heart, and not just a formal return 30-33.

1- THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PROPHET AS A WATCHMAN

Before talking about his responsibility, we wish to clarify that God’s words to him were as such: “*Speak to the children of your people*” (Ez 33:2); and not, ...’ of My people.’ He also says: “*as My people*” (Ez 33:31); namely, “as though My people.” As they have not yet enjoyed reconciliation with God, He does not call them “My people.” We saw this in our interpretation of the book of Exodus: When in a state of reconciliation with His people, God says, “My people; My Sabbath; My feasts; My incense; My offerings...,” referring the people, all its worships, feasts, and offerings, to Himself personally. While, in a state of displeasure with them, He says to His prophet, “Your people;” and to them He says: “Your feasts; Your Sabbaths; Your offerings etc.”¹

God started this set of prophecies and commandments, by an indirect admonition; saying to them: ‘I cannot call you My people any more... You are Ezekiel’s people;’ You are ‘*as My people.*’ Accept My commandment, and repent, then I would make you My people, and I

¹ للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، 1980، (خر 3: 7).

become your God. Or as He says on the tongue of the prophet Ezekiel: “*My tabernacle also shall be with them. Indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people*” (Ez 37:27).

Ezekiel then spoke of his responsibility as a ‘watchman,’ who should be outspoken for the sake of the salvation of their souls, and his own salvation. As, if he stops proclaiming the message as a compliment to them, every soul that perishes would be required at his hand: “*If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand*” (Ez 33:6).

These words are still terrifying every Bishop, Priest, and minister. As, in case they are slothful to warn their congregation - whatever the circumstances or their rank are - their own souls would be required at their hands, instead of the souls that perish. We have previously presented examples for that¹. The following are some commentaries by the Church Fathers, on the responsibility of watchmen, and their commitment to warn sinners and not to keep silent:

- ❖ According to what came in the book of Ezekiel, watchmen should not keep silent before iniquity, as long as the sword is over their heads; their silence will not benefit them, nor will benefit the sinners. They should rather watch and warn; thus those whom they warn would benefit; if not both who warns and those warned².
- ❖ The first thing I should do for my people is to present them with a message, drawn from above, to consummate my job as a watchman (Is 21:6; 62:6; Hab 2:1). If I cannot manage to stop the coming of the sword, I would save my soul and those of my listeners, proclaiming the rebellion of my people; counting what is theirs as my own. By that, I can get some kind of comfort and compassion³.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

- ❖ What kind of blood that God requires at the hand of the watchman, but that which flows out of the sinner?! By that the idiot’s heart perish; as it is said: “*Listen to me, you who have lost your hearts;*”

¹ Cf. *The interpretation of Ez. 3:15-21 in this book.*

² *In Defence of His Flight to Pontus, 64.*

³ *On His Father's Silence.*

who poured the blood and lost the power of the living soul¹.

Origen

- ❖ The watchmen in the Church are appointed to condemn sin with no mercy².

St. Augustine

- ❖ If you are given the responsibility of providing the herd with pure clean water, and saw your herd drinking muddy water; Wouldn't you do your best to rid the water of the mud?! But now, you are not responsible for a source of water, but for one of blood and Spirit. So if you see someone with a sin, which is far more dangerous than dirt and mud, and he came to you, wouldn't you be sad?! Wouldn't you try to stop him?! What would be your excuse?! God has given you this dignity for this reason, to discern these things; this is your job. Here would be your peace; and here would be your crown; not just to wear a shining white robe!³

St. John Chrysostom

2- WE SHOULD NOT DESPAIR; GOD IS MERCIFUL

If the prophet is committed to be fully outspoken in proclaiming the divine commandment and the prophecies without any flattering, for the sake of the salvation of the souls of his herd, and also his own; yet that does not mean to be hard on them. If he had formerly spoken harshly, when the danger of captivity was imminent; yet now, having already been realized, and all have entered underneath its bitterness, there is no need for despair; But, he should rather start to proclaim God's mercies and His love for mankind, even in the midst of His harsh chastisements. *Therefore, you, O son of Adam, say to the house of Israel: 'Thus you say: If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?' Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel'* (Ez 33:10, 11).

They were formerly drinking transgression like water, lightly taking sin and its activity in their life; And when they started to fall

¹ *Dial. with Heraclides, 164.*

² *City of God 1:9.*

³ *In Mat. hom 82:6.*

under chastisement, they became overcome with despair; and said that they are definitely perishing; So how can they then live?! But God, who rebuked them bitterly before chastisement, is now dealing with them with compassion and love, to spare them from being destroyed through loss of hope. The Church Fathers comment on these divine words as such:

- ❖ Although through these divine words, the sinner would again have hope; Yet there is another trap that should be taken into consideration: That through that same hope, many people would sin more (through taking sin lightly)¹.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Let him love; as God “*desires mercy more than sacrifice*” (Hos 6:6); and let him fear, as He hates sin!

Let him love; as God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he repents and lives. And let him fear; as He hates the sinners who do not repent!²

Tertullian

- ❖ It is the mission of the Savior, to call the sinners to and not the righteous to repentance; as he Himself says: “*Those who are well have no need of a physician*” (Mat 9:12, 13).

He desires the repentance of the sinner and not his death (Ez 33:11); and carries on His shoulders the poor lost sheep. When the prodigal son returned, his father joyfully received him³.

St. Jerome

3- GOD WILL NOT JUDGE US FOR OUR PAST

Opening the door for hope, God wishes us to enter into it forcibly and with no fear. That is why He offers us every comfort. He does not judge us for our past, and not even for our present, in case we present now a true repentance. He does not desire our death, but seeks our salvation with every way, offering us every possibility to return to Him. Yet, at the same time, God takes care for His children who stand, lest they fall; and warns them against leaning on their past, and so becoming slothful.

¹ *On Ps. 145:7.*

² *Adv. Marc. 2:13.*

³ *Ep.11.*

St. Jerome says: [In our life as Christians, we do not look back at the beginnings, but forward to the endings. Paul's beginning was bad, but his ending was good. Judas' beginning, on the other hand, was worthy of commendation, but his ending was miserable, because of his treason... The life of a Christian is the true ladder of Jacob, on which angels ascend and descend; while the Lord stands on its top stretching His hands to support us lest we slide; and puts his eyes on those who struggle to ascend the painful steps¹.]

We saw in our interpretation of chapter 18 how **Origen** used it to answer those who claim the diversity of the human natures; he confirms that it is possible for the wicked to repent, and for the righteous to fall. To some people who assume that man harbors either a good or a bad nature, that could not be changed, he says: [The soul of the righteous could change, as testified by the prophet Ezekiel, who says that if the righteous disregards God's commandments, his past righteousness would not be counted for him².]

If the righteous turns from his righteous life in the Lord, he would die; while the wicked, if he repents, he would find that a life in Christ would embrace him.

“When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it. But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it” (Ez 33:18, 19).

Let us then beware of sin lest we die. And in case we have died because of it, let us receive God our righteousness to live by Him. **St. Ambrose** says: [Whoever surrenders to wicked pleasures is dead; as *“She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives”* (1 Tim 5:6). Those who are nil in faith, go down into the pit while still living. Even though they may seem alive among us; yet they are actually in the pit. He who is a usurer or a thief, is not counted alive, as confirmed by Ezekiel. But if he keeps God's commandments, to fulfill it, he lives, and lives by it (Ez 33:19)... Let us then hasten to that life; as whoever touches Life will live; as did that woman who touched the border of Jesus' garment. She was healed and became free of death; to be told by Christ: *“Daughter,*

¹ Ep. 54:6.

² On Comm. Matt 13:30.

be of good cheer, your faith has made you well. Go in peace” (Luke 8:48; Mat 9:22). As, whoever touches the dead would be unclean, while he who touches the living would indeed be saved. Therefore, seek Him who is Alive; yet beware of seeking Him among the dead; lest you will be told: *“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen”* (Luke 24:5, 6).]

4- COMPARING THEMSELVES TO ABRAHAM

It came to pass that a man escaped from Jerusalem as the city was struck, and came to where the prophet Ezekiel and the captivated people were, to inform them that Jerusalem has been captured. That was in the twelfth year of captivity, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month. That is to say the news reached them six months after it happened. Then, Ezekiel’s mouth was opened, and he was no longer mute (Ez 33:22); as everyone realized the truth of the prophecies he proclaimed to it.

The children of Israel have previously said to the prophet Ezekiel: *“Abraham was only one, and he inherited the land. But we are many; the land has been given to us as a possession”* (Ez 33:24). How far are God’s measures from those of man; God looks into the heart, and gives abundantly to the pure heart, even if it is unique in the world; and does not give according to multitude. They assumed that God will neither forsake the city nor the temple, despite the abominations they did, as long as they offer Him sacrifices and offerings; while their hearts worship the idols, and are diverted to evil. God seeks the pure worship, and not the multitude of rites and formalities of worship! The obedient and believing Abraham was worthy of inheriting all that land; while no one among the tens of thousands of his descendants at that time was worthy to inherit it! The Church is in need for true saints, in whose hearts God would find comfort, even if they are only very few in number! That is why God’s words to the prophet Ezekiel came, to tell them that unless they become pure like their father Abraham, they would never be worthy of inheriting the land.

That is repentance... It is the return to the hidden holy life!

5- A RETURN FROM THE HEART, AND NOT JUST AN APPARENT RETURN

As the news reached them, the multitude came to Ezekiel to hear

him, having realized that he is speaking the truth. They probably also came to him eagerly and in great number, because, after he used to speak to them with words of rebuke and repentance, before the fall of Jerusalem, he started to talk about God's revenge against the wicked people who rejoice for their affliction; and to give them hope for return and reform. And they probably also came to him to enjoy his superb way of speech.

The prophet was not comfortable to see them coming to him, for the sake of temporary enjoyment of his thoughts, and not for true repentance; as God said to him: *"So they come to you as people do; they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain"* (Ez 33:31).

His words were just like poetry that is offered with beautiful voice accompanied by sweet music; to which they listen for a certain time, and then go! God does not seek mere listening, but wishes for deeds... for true and practical repentance that comes from the heart!

TAKE AWAY FROM ME THE SPIRIT OF FAILURE

How amazing are You, O God, in Your plan for us!
You allowed for the firm chastisement of the people,
even for the Babylonian captivity!
And threatened to destroy Jerusalem, the holy city, with its temple;
And commanded Your prophet, as a watchman, to utter the truth,
even though cruel!
Then, despite all that, when the people have fallen into captivity,
You try to take away their despair!
You provoke them to true repentance filled with hope!

Here I am in Your hands, O the Savior of my soul!
Who could save me from feeling failure, but You?!

In chastening me, hold tight my depths, to keep them from collapsing!
Transfigure inside me, to keep my soul from being destroyed!
Make me repent, and support me by the spirit of hope!

You, O Lord God, care for the heart and not for the appearances!
You seek a holy heart as that of Abraham;
Rather than many, who mix the true with the vain!

Sanctify us! Count us as the little remnant sanctified on Your account!
Receive my heart, my mind, and my feelings!
Receive my body and my behavior!
I am in Your hands, I seek the work of Your Holy Spirit in me!

CHAPTER 34

GOD SHEPHERDS HIS FLOCK

Having chastened the foreign enemy (Chapters 25-32), God demands from His people the true repentance (Chapter 33). Now, He starts to rebuke the wicked shepherds who feed themselves and not their flock. He Himself is going to take over their care, establishing a new kind of shepherding.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- Irresponsible and selfish shepherds | 1-10. |
| 2- God the true Shepherd of His people | 11-22. |
| 3- Establishing a new kind of shepherding | 23-31. |

1- IRRESPONSIBLE AND SELFISH SHEPHERDS

“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool. You slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; But with force and cruelty you have ruled them”(Ez 34:2-4). The shepherd’s heart, that gets diverted from the people of God to himself, cares for his own benefits; works for the sake of his own dignity, possessions, and the comfort of his body, etc. Instead of caring for their needs and benefits, he does not care for the sick, the wounded, the broken, the lost, or what is driven away, among them but cares for his own selfishness. Such a man is not counted as a shepherd, but as a hireling; who seeks the wages but not the sonhood; sometimes he is even counted as a thief who steals the flock instead of protecting and supporting it.

- ❖ There are hirelings who work in the church; of whom the apostle Paul says: *“They seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus”* (Phil 2:21). What does “seek their own,” mean? They do not love Christ for free. They do not seek the things that are God’s, but seek the temporal benefits; they open their mouths for gain; and seek dignity from people. When an overseer seeks such things, and serves God for the sake of getting them; this man, whoever he is, is counted as a hireling, and would never be counted among the children. About such people, the Lord also says: *“Assuredly, I say to you, they have*

got their reward” (Mat 6:5). Hirelings are there among us. Yet God, who knows the hearts, recognizes them, even if we cannot; Having not uttered in vain, in His talk about the wolves: “By their fruits you will know them” (Mat 7:20)¹.

St. Augustine

The selfishness of the shepherd makes him lose the compassionate fatherhood for the weaklings²; and would turn him, not merely into a hireling, but also into a cruel domineering; This cruelty would lead the people to be scattered, “to become food for all the beasts of the field,,, to wander through all the mountains, and on every high hill..., and over the whole face of the earth” (Ez 34:5).

Man would become prey for all kinds of demons that devour the flock of God, because of the slothfulness of the shepherds and their preoccupation by themselves. The flock would walk with no aim nor shelter; would wander from one mountain to another, from one hill to another, and from one place to another, with no discernment, wisdom, or knowledge; would become the plaything of the demons, cast from one to another until completely destroyed.

“I am against the shepherds; and I will require My flock at their hand” (Ez 34:10). **Fr. Caesarius of Arles, says:** [As long as the Lord sets us to pilot His ship, let us, with His help, and the guidance of the two Testaments, try to control the ship of His Church; to keep it from diverting, through our negligence to the right or left; but to keep it on the right course in the midst of the dangerous waves of the sea of this world. As long as no ship can get earthly gains without troubles; so also the ship of the Church, cannot get the gains and joy of eternity without passing through many troubles.]

The Lord cries out, saying: “You shepherds, hear the word of the Lord...: My flock became a prey” (Ez 34:7, 8). He makes them responsible; as they became the cause of destruction and perdition of the souls, instead of being for them a refuge and a good hold, against the wild wolves.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic wrote to Bishop Dracontium

¹ للمؤلف : الحب الرعوي، ص 496-497.

² راجع كلمات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم عن الرعاية كأبوة، في كتابنا: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1980.

about his pastoral responsibilities, saying: [Before you gain the grace of Bishopric, nobody knew you. But now, you became the one, from whom the congregation expect to get their food; namely, the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. Now, in case they suffer hunger while you fulfill only yourself; when the Lord Christ comes, and you stand before him, How will you defend yourself, when He finds His flock hungry?¹]

Sometimes things do not stop at just drinking the fresh water alone or feeding on the spiritual food, leaving their flocks hungry and thirsty; they sometimes, selfishly keep for themselves the deep clear waters to drink from, and do not even leave the shallow waters for their flock, but foul them with their feet. *“Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture - and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet?”* (Ez 34:18, 19). **St. Jerome** believes that the muddy feet of the heretics foul the clear waters, and corrupt the faith of the congregation².

2- GOD, THE TRUE SHEPHERD OF HIS PEOPLE

“For thus says the Lord God: ‘Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out’” (Ez 34:11). For God, there is nothing more valuable than the human soul that he created in His image, and according to His likeness. If he would entrust His people to the hands of shepherds, this is for the sake of dignifying humanity, to share with God, and in His name and power, the care for the souls. Yet God dearly keeps that divine work to Himself, saying: *“I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.”*

In His care for His flock, God does not bear the selfishness of the shepherds He set to minister to His children. That is why He Himself stands in their faces; counting every negligence or fault on their part, as though personally directed against Him. He addresses every soul, abused or neglected by the shepherds, saying: *“Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand. I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more. For I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them”* (Ez 34:10). He takes the care for His people

¹ Ep. 49:2.

² Ep. 127:9.

on Himself! It gives Him pleasure to call Himself “A *Shepherd*,” repeating the word, “*My flock*” 14 times in this chapter; confirming that they are His people; saying: “*My people*;” They are His own, He saves them from the wicked shepherds, as well as from the foreign enemy, and receives their life Himself.

If the shepherds have devoured the flock; the great Shepherd will receive His flock, to judge on behalf of the weak flock against the violent shepherd: “*Therefore thus says the Lord God to them: ‘Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat (the aggressive shepherd) and the lean sheep (the poor flock)... Therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep’*” (Ez 34:20, 21). All will be equal before Me - the shepherds and the flock - I will judge all, and between a sheep and a sheep.

As such should be the successful minister; he is the one who looks forward to the coming of the great Shepherd to judge all with impartiality. He does not look at the faces, and does not care for dignities. On the contrary, the more someone is given, the more he will be asked to give! The clever minister is the one who always hides in the Good Shepherd; he will only minister through Him, by Him, and according to His divine thought. By that, the minister would never raise himself above his flock; and would never think of himself as someone better than his brothers.

3- ESTABLISHING A NEW KIND OF SHEPHERDING

Having spoken of God’s care for mankind, He proclaimed the summit of this shepherding through the Lord Christ; the true spiritual King - the Son of David; saying: “*I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them - My servant David - He shall feed them and be their shepherd*” (Ez 34:23). No doubt, “*My servant David*” does not imply that king David will be risen from the dead to reign anew; but the appearance of the Lord Christ; the Son of God, who became a Servant to reign over us through His love and humility.

Concerning this, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [As for Ezekiel and other prophets, their talk about the coming of David, does not mean him who is already dead¹.] **Origen** says: [It is not the Patriarch David, who will rise and judge the saints, but Christ².] And **St. Augustine** says:

¹ *On Matt, hom 2:6.*

² *Comm. Joan 1:23.*

[Ezekiel speaks prophetically in the person of God the Father, proclaiming ahead about the Lord Christ, in a prophetic way, as being David, who took the image of a Servant and became Man - He who is the Son of God¹.]

He speaks of this good Shepherd; the Savior Messiah as such:

a- He will make a covenant with humanity (Ez 34:35); that He will write, not on stone tablets, but will inscribe with blood on His holy body, by His divine love; to bring us unto Him, and to accept Him an eternal Groom.

b- *“He will cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods”* (Ez 34:25). What are these wild beasts that He will cause to cease from the land, but the works of the old man, full of violence; that will be uprooted from the land of our body, to let us live in peace? By the wild beasts, He probably means the Gentiles. They receive the faith and turn from their wild nature, to live by a new spirit and a new nature.

c- *“I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing ; and I will cause showers to come down in their season”* (Ez 34:26). That will be when the Lord Christ Himself descends from heaven, to dampen the soul and quench its iniquities.

d- *“Then the trees of the field - that is the church - shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase”* (Ez 34:27). He plants the tree of the New Covenant (the Church) in His holy body, to yield much fruit. He plants us in Him; to bless our nature in Him, for the land of our body to become in permanent peace.

e- He will *“break the bands of their yoke and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them”* (Ez 34:27). On the cross he tears and wipes out the written code of requirements that was against us, to set us free from the bondage of the devil that enslaved us. And as the apostle Paul says: *“Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us which was contrary to us. And He had taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it”* (Col 2:14, 15). That is why the prophet Ezekiel again confirms on the tongue of the Lord Himself: *“They shall no longer be a prey for the*

¹ City of God 18:34.

nations; nor shall beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid” (Ez 34:28). Namely, they shall no more be a prey for the devils, nor be devoured by the beasts of the land (body lusts); but they shall be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of comfort and conquest.

f- His work will not stop at breaking the yoke of the bondage of evil, and driving away the wild nature, but He also presents the positive side: *“I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops) (Ez 34:29). He uproots the old nature, and grants a new one, according to His image to fulfill man with Him personally.*

g- What gives the Lord pleasure is to make them *“His people,”* and to be *“their God,”* who dwells in their midst and unites with them. *“Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,’ says the Lord God. ‘You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,’ says the Lord God” (Ez 34:30, 31). That is the climax of all His gifts to them: He Himself will be their God, and they will become His flock, His people, in whom He finds pleasure. That is why St. John the beloved heard a description of heaven or the eternal life as such: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God Himself will be with them and He their God” (Rev 21:3).*

YOU ARE MY SHEPHERD!

You are amazing, O my Lord, in Your care for me!
Threatening selfish shepherds; Who seek what is their own at the
expense of Your flock!
You Yourself judge between the suppressive shepherds and the
suppressed flock!

You came to our land as the good Shepherd;
You gave Yourself up for my sake, and for the sake of every man!
You opened up Your heaven as a fulfilling pasture!
You surrounded us with Your Holy Spirit, as dew that dampens our
hearts.
You presented to us the fruit of the Spirit in our depths!

How sweet are Your words; and how powerful! You say; and You act:
“I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out;”

I will bring them over to a good pasture; I will shepherd My flock; and
seek the lost ones;
And bring back the one driven away; I will tend to the broken; bandage
the wounded; and I will control the fat and strong;
I will shepherd all with justice!

CHAPTER 35

A PROPHECY AGAINST THE MOUNT OF SEIR

In the course of the prophecies against the foreign nation who rejoiced for the calamity of Israel (Chapters 25-33), the prophet Ezekiel prophesied against Seir, together with Moab (Ez 25:8). He also prophesied against Edom - that included the Mount of Seir within its territory (Ez 25:12). So now, why did he come back to prophesy more freely against Seir, in the course of his talk about the internal reform?

1- We cannot isolate the external work from the internal one. Indeed, God intended to prepare the way for the return of His people and for the internal reform on the level of both the people and the rulers, by destroying the external evil powers. Yet actually and practically, the two aspects of reform, go hand in hand. There is no possibility of destruction of the powers of external evil, without setting forth the repentance within. And there is no possibility of internal reform without the destruction of the external evil. Every internal reform, would provoke and agitate the external enemy (Satan). That is why Nehemiah was building the walls of Jerusalem with one hand, while holding the sword with the other hand (Neh 4:17). So also, when man works spiritually, he should be alert for every war that may come against him to destroy him.

2- He might have spoken against the Mount of Seir in particular, because of the news that came to the people in captivity that the Edomites have gradually infiltrated into Judah after the capture of Jerusalem, and occupied it. So the prophet intended to confirm to them that God will save the land from those aggressors; especially that the dispute on the land between Israel and Edom has been an old issue (Gen 27:40). By that he opened up another cause for reform; as God is going to intercede to reform, because of the false claims of the people of Seir; something that will be obvious in the following chapter.

The main points on which this prophecy were based are:

1- **The hatred:** The hatred of Seir to the people of Israel had taken roots in their souls since the old days; He says: *“Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, when their iniquity came to an end”* (Ez 35:5). Their hatred did not stop at rejoicing

for their calamity, but extended to blood shedding and oppression; It provoked them to the sword. *“Since you have not hated blood, therefore blood shall pursue you”* (Ez 35:6).

With the same measure man uses, it will be measured back to him; likewise in the same pit he digs for his brother, he will fall. On the same cross that Haman prepared for Mordecai, he was crucified (Esther 7:10).

2- Planning against others: *“Because you have said, ‘These two nations, and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them,’ although the Lord was there”* (Ez 35:10). Thus, when man intends to possess a land that does not belong to him, he does not realize that God, the unseen, sees and notices his oppression. Seir intended to possess what is not hers; so she loses what is hers; *“Her cities will be laid waste and will become desolate”* (Ez 35:4).

3- Their blasphemous arrogance: *“Thus with your mouth you have boasted against Me and multiplied your words against Me; I have heard them”*(Ez 35:13). When it intended to possess what is not its right to have, the Lord was there to see and watch their evil; and as it got arrogant in its heart, and uttered with its lips against God, He was hearing. He was very long-suffering. But now He punishes it for its blasphemy.

4- They rejoiced for what befell Judah the day of its chastisement: When Judah fell to chastisement, Seir did not learn the lesson, but because it rejoiced; it was worthy of God’s wrath: *“As you rejoiced because the inheritance of the house of Israel was desolate, so I will do to you; You shall be desolate, O Mount Seir, as well as all of Edom - all of it! Then they shall know that I am the Lord”* (Ez 35:15).

What befell the Mount of Seir was the fruit of its inner iniquity; and also for the sake of the edification of the people of God for the former has become usurpers of their rights thus God defends His children for the sake of His holy name; *“Then they shall know that I am the Lord”* (Ez 35:15).

LET ALL YOUR ADVERSARIES BE SCATTERED!

Who is this (Edom) who rejoices for the calamity of Your Church;
But the violent and bloodthirsty devil?

Here is my adversary hating me! His hatred is very ancient.
It is hatred against You, O the Lover of my soul!
He hates me fiercely, because he hates You!
He sets the cross for You; to get, himself, crucified by it!

My adversary wishes to confiscate my heart.
It is not his, or even mine; but it is completely Yours!
He wishes to possess what does not belong to him;
To confiscate Your kingdom in me!
Arise O Lord;
And let Your adversaries be scattered;
And let all who hate Your name flee before Your face!

My adversary is arrogant;
But his end will be in the abyss!
As for me; You will carry me with Your Holy Spirit to the bosom of
Your Father!

CHAPTER 36

A PROPHECY ON THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL

In the last chapter, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied against Seir, as a representative of the devil that opposes God in His people. Here, he talks about God's care for His people, and His zeal for them against the devil who intends to destroy them. This divine zeal is based on an integral reform, and a renewal of human nature; so God would be sanctified in their life.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- God's zeal for His mountain | 1-15. |
| 2- Reform after chastening them | 16-21. |
| 3- An integral reform | 22-38. |

1- GOD'S ZEAL FOR HIS MOUNTAIN

In this chapter God reveals a new cause for his intercession to reform His people; that is His zeal for His holy name that was insulted by the nations, who assumed that God is weak, because of the chastisements that have befallen His people. They rejoiced for the desolation of His people, said wrong things about His holy name, and infiltrated into the land of inheritance to be theirs instead of the people of God; God says: "*Because the enemy has said of you, 'Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession'*" (Ez 36:2). They rejoiced for their affliction and benefited from it. That is why God arose to save His people "*in His burning jealousy*" (Ez 36:5); Beholding the mountains, hills, rivers, valleys, the desolate wastes, and the cities that have been forsaken, which became plunder and mockery to the rest of the nations all around; and says: "*Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and My fury, because you have borne the shame of the nations... Therefore thus says the Lord, 'I have lifted My hand in an oath that surely the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame'*" (Ez 36:6, 7).

What are those mountains, but the prophets; the hills, but the priests; the rivers, but the preachers; and the valleys, but the weak souls. As to the desolate wastes and the cities that have been forsaken, these are the people who perished because of the wickedness and negligence of their shepherds.

He addresses the shepherds and the flock; the priests and the people; the elite and the despised; those steady as the mountains, and those collapsed as the desolate cities... He addresses them all, proclaiming that He will intercede to reform them; not for their own sake, but for the sake of the fury of His zeal, and because of the reproaches of the nations against Him and them!

He lifted His hand (Ez 36:7) to speak against the nations; as though proclaiming an oath; as it was the custom of the Jews in those days, when making an oath, to lift their hands. He confirms with an oath that he will intercede to reform them by His flaring zeal. In that, He is not oppressing the nations; but paying them back for what they did; *“to bear their own shame”* (Ez 36:7). What they did to others, would come back on them; they would drink the same cup that they set for others.

The Lord then beholds the holy mountains, as though looking at His Church, to proclaim that He will offer them a new possibility of fruition; so that when His people return, they will find the mountains cultivated and fruitful; the cities inhabited, the ruins rebuilt (Ez 36:10); and the mountains full of men and beasts (Ez 36:12).

Amazing is God in His love for man; offering him the possibility of return, not to what he used to be before the fall and captivity; but to a better situation; saying: *“I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am the Lord”* (Ez 36:11). That was what the Lord Christ did with us: He presented to us the holy mountains (the Church), cultivated and set for inhabiting, not as the old lost Paradise, but far better and greater; to enter into the holy mountains, not to find the tree of life, but to find Christ Himself the Life-giver. Instead of the rivers, we shall find the fountains of the Holy Spirit flooding with divine graces. And instead of the desolation and destruction that have befallen us, our heart would be filled with the eternal kingdom of God.

In the era of grace, man did not only return to his original state before his fall, but became a son of God the Father, a member in the body of the Lord Christ, and a holy temple for the Holy Spirit. What glory is greater than this?! Our state now - in Christ Jesus - became better than our beginnings!

What does God do to His holy mountain? *“I will multiply men*

upon you... I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young. I will make you inhabited... Yes, I will cause men to walk on you, My people Israel; they shall take possession of you, and you shall be their inheritance; no more shall you bereave them of their children” (Ez 36:10-12).

He will multiply the people in His Church - His holy mountain - He will bring them over from east and west, from every nation and of every tongue. He will multiply men and beasts and will make them fruitful. He will not only bring them from all over the world to His mountain, but He will bless every single one of them; will bless every one's soul (man), and his body (symbolized by the beast), will multiply them and make them fruitful; as the soul, as well as the body will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

There will be no more animosity between man and animal; between the soul and the body; but they will dwell together as though in Paradise; working in harmony under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

He says that people will walk on the mountains; as they enter as the people of God into the Church; will become in a persistent and continuous motion until they inherit the holy mountain; and death will no more approach them! They will enter into the eternal Church - the divine inheritance - where there are neither death nor suffering or affliction.

2- REFORM AFTER CHASTENING THEM

The prophet was inquiring: If You are going to turn the people to a better condition than what they used to be; if the desolate cities will be inhabited, and the ruins will be rebuilt; why have you allowed all that desolation and destruction? The divine response came to proclaim that what God did, was to chasten the people because of their wickedness; so that if they did fall under chastisement, and the nations reproached them, God, by His divine jealousy would turn them to a condition better than they used to be. Although their ways and deeds were so defiled like the uncleanness of a woman in her customary impurity, they committed abominations, bloodshed and became the cause of blasphemy on His holy name. However, having chastened them, He again started to have compassion on them for the sake of His holy name.

3- AN INTEGRAL REFORM

Having talked about His zeal for reform, He started to talk about the goals and ways of this reform; commanding the prophet to say to the house of Israel, “*Thus says the Lord: ‘I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel... but for My holy name’s sake... and the nations shall know that I am the Lord,’ says the Lord God, ‘when I am hallowed in you before their eye’s’*” (Ez 36:22, 23).

What does the Lord mean by that? Does He work for our salvation and reform, only for His holy name’s sake, and not for our sake? Does that involve selfishness? Does He care for His holy name, and not for us? Impossible! But saying “*Not for your sake,*” does not mean that He does not care for us, but He is not doing it for our worthiness, nor through our possibilities. But He works in us for the sake of His holy name, and by His possibilities as the Holy One. He so loves us to make us the subject of “*glorifying His holy name.*” He transfigures by His holiness in us; the way a father rejoices for the success of his children, as though it is his own success; and counts them as worthy of his fatherhood. God is lifting us up from the spirit of servitude, to the spirit of sonhood, that is capable of proclaiming clearly the glory of God the Father; or setting us as a holy body, that reveals through its wise behavior, the wisdom of its head.

His care for proclaiming the sanctity of His name in us , reveals in itself, His love for us.

The ways of that integral reform are:

a- “*I will take you from among the nations. Gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land*” (Ez 36:24). It is a call to establish one holy people, gathered from all lands; namely, from all countries, tongues, and peoples; to bring them into their own land; namely, to the Church that is theirs. This is the call of the Lord Christ to all humanity, to gather together in Him, to become His holy body; to rest in Him as though in its own land or home.

b- If God, for the sake of bloodshed, and the abominations of idolatry, appeared as though weak before the nations; delivering His people to Babylon. In order to have His name glorified; and His power revealed, the need is not just to bring them back to their land, but rather to forgive their sins by His precious blood, shed for their sake; that they enjoy through the holy water of Baptism.

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ez 36:25). Through the forgiveness of their sins, they will have the right to return to their cities, and to rebuild their ruins. So says the Lord God: “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilted instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by” (Ez 36:33, 34).

That is the work of the holy water; **Barnabas** says: [Indeed we descend into the water, while full of iniquities and defilements; then ascend from it, bearing fruition in our hearts; bearing in our spirits the fear of God, and the hope in Jesus Christ¹.] And **St. Clement of Alexandria** says: [Baptism cleanses us from every blemish; makes us a holy temple of God; and brings us back to the fellowship of the divine nature, by the Holy Spirit².]

c- Purification in the holy water, does not stop at cleansing us from our old sins, and uprooting every blemish in us; but extends to replacing our corrupt nature, with a new one that suits the new life in the new land: *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh” (Ez 36:26).* That new heart and new spirit, would be realized through being granted the new spiritual birth in the holy water of Baptism. **St. Cyprian** says: [It is in the water of Baptism, that the old man dies, and the new man is born; according to the apostle Paul’s confirmation, that *“He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5)*³.]

d- By being granted the forgiveness, and having enjoyed the new heart through the Holy Spirit in the water of Baptism, we get prepared to accept the Holy Spirit in us through the sacrament of Chrismation (the Mayron). This is the sign of the New Testament; the gift given to us by the Lord Christ - the gift of His Spirit; saying: *“I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ez 36:27)*

¹ *Epis. of Barnabas, 11.*

² *In Lucam 22:8.*

³ *Epist. 74:5.*

This is the new possibility to walk in God's statutes, in keeping His judgments and doing them. It is the possibility of His Holy Spirit, that He granted to us within us. That is why the prophets concentrated on this gift.

Of their sayings: *"I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live"* (Ez 37:14); *"I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel"* (Ez 39:29).

"For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants" (Is 44:3). (The work of the Holy Spirit in us is like that of the water to the thirsty, and of the flood to the dry ground).

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; Your old men shall dream dreams; Your young men shall see visions; And also on My menservants and on My maidservants, I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28, 29).

e- Always remembering our weaknesses; saying: *"Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations"* (Ez 36:31). If God granted us the forgiveness of our sins in the worthiness of His blood; gave us a new nature; and presented to us His Spirit to dwell in us; Yet amid our rejoicing for His great deeds to us, and our continuous hope in Him; we should always remember our weaknesses; in order to rebuke our souls, and warn ourselves lest we fall; according to the words of the repentant Psalmist: *"My sin is ever before me"* (Ps 51:3). As though we are the paralyzed who, after being healed and risen from his bed; was committed to carry his own bed, in order to remember his weakness. Yet, in remembering our iniquities, we should act with the spirit of discernment; we should not recall their details, so as not to get offended by their memory; and we should not also remember them with the spirit of despair, and lose our joy in salvation. **St. Penophius** often spoke of this issue, warning us, lest remembering our iniquities may suffocate our souls through their abominable odors¹.

f- **Persistent growth:** Through remembering our own weaknesses, we come to believe in Him, who persistently works in us, to

¹ راجع المؤلف: تلمذتي لأب اعترافي، 1974، ص 127-137.

bring us to perfection. Feeling our weakness may destroy our souls; but our faith in Him, who persistently works in us, will cause us to grow; That is why God goes on to say: *“I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places, and planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it”* (Ez 36:36); and *“I will increase their men like flock; like a flock offered as holy sacrifices; like the flock of Jerusalem on its feast days; so that the ruined cities be filled with flocks of men”* (Ez 36:37, 38). He works in us to fill our inner Jerusalem with increasing fruition; and to set us forth from glory to glory, to bring us into His perfection.

SET ME AS A HOLY MOUNTAIN FOR YOU!

Set me, O Lord, as a holy mountain for You!
Make me steady like mountains;
So that the devil would not be able to move me!

Send Your Holy Spirit as rain on me;
To transform me into a fruitful Paradise.
Carrying in me Your cross;
That is the tree of eternal life.

You increase men and beasts;
You bless my rational soul;
You sanctify my body; to bear no more the animal nature!
Your Holy Spirit renews my nature, to live eternally!

How rich is Your grace!
How great is the flood of Your compassion!
You forgive my iniquities and rebellion;
You uproot my abominations, and grant me the holy life!
As for me, I will always remember my weakness;
And will admit Your favor on me!
O Lord, set me a holy mountain for You!

CHAPTER 37

RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

Speaking about the inner reform through the holy Baptism, the enjoyment of the new heart and the new spirit, and being granted the Holy Spirit in them; He was committed to speak to them about the work of the Holy Spirit in them, being “resurrection from the dead.”

- 1- The valley of the dry bones 1-6.**
- 2- The return of life to the dry bones 7-10.**
- 3- Resurrection of the heart 11-14.**
- 4- Resurrection and unity 15-28.**

1- THE VALLEY OF THE DRY BONES

Having been driven out of their land, because of their idolatrous abominations and their bloodshed; their cities became desolate and uninhabited. It became like a valley full of many very dry bones. It came to be like a battleground, in which all men were killed with nobody to bury them; it turned into a multitude of scattered bones, that were struck by the sun and the wind for a long time, and that made them very dry. In other words it became like an open grave that contains lifeless bones! This is not a portrait of cities; but rather of the people themselves, who were scattered with devastated souls in many locations, to turn into something like the valley of death, covered by dry bones, that need someone to raise them from the dead, and give them their life back.

This vision actually presents to us the resurrection from the dead, as a divine work, continuous along the history, on several aspects; of which are the following:

a- Resurrection of the old people through returning from the Babylonian captivity once more to the promised land, as one kingdom, with one new heart.

b- Resurrection of the souls from the death of sin, to enter into the life of righteousness and holiness; the divine heavenly spiritual life; through the action of the incarnate Word of God, the Grantor of life.

c- Resurrection of the Church of the New Testament of all nations and peoples, those who received faith, to be granted the resurrection from the dead to life, to live as a heavenly bride, through the preaching of the gospel.

d- Resurrection of the bodies of saints in the great day of the

Lord, when the souls that have already enjoyed the resurrection through their faith in the Lord Christ, receive the bodies that were theirs, in order that man remains body and soul in the eternal glories. The expressions in this chapter were used in the early Church, as a testimony to resurrection. For instance **Tertullian** believed that this prophecy refers to the resurrection of the Jewish people from the dead captivity; and at the same time, he sees in it a proclamation of the resurrection of the body, which is undeniable¹. **St. Ambrose** says: [How great and compassionate is God's love for us; setting the prophet to testify to the coming resurrection; for us to see through his eyes. As it is impossible for all of us to be eyewitnesses. In that One, we become as such².]

e- Some scholars believe that this chapter prophesies about the return of Israel and its acceptance of faith in the Lord Christ at the end of ages; when the Holy Spirit works in them to raise them up from the death of disbelief.

As to the vision itself, it came to express in detail the work of God in raising us from the dead. He starts it by saying: "*The hand of the Lord came upon me, and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around; and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry*" (Ez 37:1, 2). If the hand of God - as we have already said - refers to the second Hypostasis, the incarnate Son of God, it is as though, it was impossible for the prophet Ezekiel to go down to the valley, nor to see the many scattered dry bones, nor to behold the resurrection, unless the Lord Christ holds his hand and leads him by His Spirit, to bring him down to the valley.

It is the work of the Lord Christ - the Hand of God - to get us by the Spirit of the Lord out from ourselves, and bring us first to the valley, to get down there to see the death in which we are; then to lift us up to the joy of resurrection together with Him. He promised to send His Holy Spirit "*to convict the world of sin*" (John 16:8); that divine Spirit which will open our insight, to recognize our death; then to accept the resurrection in us.

In other words, if our inner Ezekiel intends to go down by

¹ *De Resur. Carn.* 29, 33.

² *On Belief in the Resurrection* 2:37.

himself to the valley, he would not be able to come out of the ‘ego;’ as this is the work of God, to get him out to behold, through the eyes of the Lord, and not through the darkened human eyes. If he gets down and discovers death, he would be utterly destroyed, as he would not be able to touch and experience the resurrection, except through the Lord Christ Himself, the risen from the dead. That is why the holy Fathers discern between true repentance and human regret: the first is the fruit of the divine Spirit who fills the soul with comfort and hope in the bitter most moments of repentance, and in the midst of tears, whereas the human regret would lead to despair, like what happened to Judas when his conscience rebuked him without resorting to the Savior, and seeking the work of the Spirit of the Lord in him.

2- THE RETURN OF LIFE TO THE DRY BONES

As the prophet Ezekiel prophesied according to God’s command, *“There was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone”* (Ez 37:7). The noise probably refers to ‘the word of God;’ namely to the divine voice who grants life and resurrection, whereas the rattling refers to the intervention of the Spirit of God. As to the bones coming together, bone-to-bone, that happened according to a thorough divine plan. This refers to gathering the Jewish people from the Diaspora, every tribe joining together. And it also proclaims to the integration of the body of Christ; namely the Church, that gathers together from every race, tongue, and nation; as though scattered dry bones, gathered together by the Holy Spirit to become the One holy body of Christ, working together. In that work, it is also a living portrait of the work of the Holy Spirit in the human soul, that became a ruin; He gathers together the bones, in an exalted way, for the energies and talents of man to work together in harmony by a divine plan.

“The Lord God says: ‘Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live” (Ez 37:9). It is God’s work, who sends His Holy Spirit on the soul, that became as though slain, and grants it life. The work of the Holy Spirit does not stop there, but will make it bear the power of action and ministry; turning it into *“an exceedingly great army”* (Ez 37:10). It is as though man, through death, would become a group of many and very dry bones; and in his resurrection by God, he would become an exceedingly great army. Our

spiritual life does not know half solutions: either fatal death or powerful and active life. In the psalm of repentance, as the Psalmist encountered with God His Savior, he did not stop at repenting and returning to life after death, but says: *“Then I will teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted to You”* (Ps 51:13). He tasted life after death; so he would not stop preaching that life to every transgressor and every hypocrite, to bring everyone together with him to that new life.

3- THE RESURRECTION OF THE HEART

Lest the listener may assume that what the prophet Ezekiel saw, only concerns the return of the Jewish people from captivity to the Promised Land, the Lord clearly confirms that that vision proclaims the resurrection of the soul that died through forsaking its God; and the resurrection of the heart destroyed by despair, to become a grave full of dry bones. He says: *“They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off.’.. I will open your graves, and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel”*(Ez 37:12). He is talking to people, who are alive according to the body, but dead according to the spirit; that is why He opens up their inner graves and resurrects their souls. Here He repeats the expression *“O My people...”* After calling them *“the people,”* they became by the power of resurrection, *“the people of God,”* who finds pleasure in referring them to Himself.

4- RESURRECTION AND UNITY

“Again the word of God came to me, saying: ‘As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: ‘for Judah and for the children of Israel his companions,’ then take another stick and write on it, ‘for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions. Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand” (Ez 37:15-17). In that prophetic action, there is probably a prophecy about the union of Judah with Ephraim; namely, the kingdoms of the north and the south. In this interpretation and symbol - that the Lord Himself presents in detail, it is to be noticed:

a- Resurrection is not an individual work, but, even if it were a personal work tasted and enjoyed by every man, yet he receives the resurrection, by being brought into a fellowship in the one people, the one Church, the bride of the One Christ. As the apostle Paul spoke to the

Ephesians about the Church, being the body of Christ that enjoys resurrection together with Him, he spoke of her, not as members isolated from one another, but as members of each others, who enjoy the possibilities of the Lord Christ in them; saying about the Church: *“He might gather together in one all things in Christ”* (Eph 1:10); *“Which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”* (Eph 1:23); *“In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit”* (Eph 2:21, 22). In Christ, I get together with my brothers by the union of the Spirit, for the body to be proclaimed whole; and in Him I grow, not individually, but as an integral part of the one holy temple; and represent a living portion in the tabernacle of the One God; namely, in His sanctuaries. My resurrection is an integral part of the resurrection of the catholic (universal) Church; and the resurrection of the whole body is the source of my resurrection in the Lord.

b- The Lord chose in His parable two sticks that became one in the hand of the prophet; as though they are the two boards of the cross: the vertical and the horizontal, that came together in the hand of the Lord, to proclaim the unity through the cross. I previously dealt with the sayings of the Church Fathers concerning the work of the cross and its activity, in gathering us together, in a vertical unity as well as a horizontal one¹. Our first unity with God, represents that of heaven with the earth; whereas the horizontal unity is that of nations and peoples; namely, the unity of humans together through the cross; the apostle says: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ... That He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity”* (Eph 2:13-16). By the cross He put to death the anmity that was between one man and another.

c- All the names of the tribes of the two kingdoms of Israel were inscribed on the cross (the two boards); to give every man a place in the crucified, who is filled with love with no discrimination.

d- The cause of that one nation or one people, who enjoyed the resurrection from the dead, is *“One King over them all”* (Ez 37:22); proclaimed as such: *“David My servant shall be king over them, and*

¹ للمؤلف: الكنيسة بيت الله، فصل "الصليب".

they shall all have one shepherd” (Ez 37:24).

The mystery of unity is for us to be all brought “in Christ Jesus,” our sole Shepherd; “*accepted in the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6); in whom we enjoy the new creation. He embraces us, we who were once strangers and afar, have become close to Him, to have our building consummated in Him, as a living divine sanctuary, and an eternal temple of God.

e- He sets us as one Church, that enjoys the resurrected life; namely, His divine life, through His eternal covenant with us. An everlasting covenant, in which He pledges, not only our resurrection, but our permanent growth, through dwelling in our midst and over us, namely, He dwells among His people, who become, like the cherubim, a divine throne carrying Him. That is what He means by saying: “*Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them. I will establish them and multiply them; and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; Indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people*” (Ez 37:26, 27). He delivered that covenant into our hands, to holdfast; through it we are sanctified by His dwelling in us, and His acceptance of us as His throne. That is the source of our sanctification; as He says: “*The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel*” (Ez 37:28). This is the new Israel, who received God as the secret of its sanctification.

THE VALLEY OF THE DRY BONES!

What do you behold in me, O My Savior? I am a valley of dry bones!
By Your Holy Spirit, You grant me the resurrected life!
Instead of death, You grant me purity and sanctification!
Amazing is Your work, O You the Risen from the dead!
You raise me up, and set of me an exceedingly great army!

By Your Holy Spirit, You sanctify my emotions and feelings;
You sanctify my heart and mind; my thoughts, words, and works
You sanctify my talents and possibilities;
And You set out of all these an exceedingly great army!
You raise me up, to unify with the rest of my brothers!
You make us one stick; with one heart and one spirit!
You are our resurrection and the source of our unity!
Reign over us to make out of us one Church that enjoys the risen life!

CHAPTER 38

GOG AND MAGOG

The prophecies against “*Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Mashech, and Tubal,*” included in chapters 38 and 39 of the book of Ezekiel, have occupied the minds of the scholars of the New Testament since the early days; especially that “Gog and Magog” came in the book of Rev (20:8), to represent a fierce war against the kingdom of God at the end of ages on the level of the whole world, that will ultimately end in the victory of the Truth after great affliction. That is why two groups of interpreters appeared: One group believe that the ‘Gog’ is a real person who carried that name, and who has been a prince on the land of ‘Magog’ that made war against Israel on its return from captivity. They interpret what came in the two chapters in a literal way. The other group believe that what came here, is nothing but a symbol that represents the animosity against God, and the resistance to His kingdom in every era, and particularly at the end of ages.

GOG

The origin of this word in the Acadian language is the word ‘Gagu,’ meaning a precious jewelry of gold. ‘*Gog, of the land of Magog,*’ the prince of Mashech and Tubal, was a symbol of idolatry, with all its energies, adversary to the kingdom of God. The name was probably taken from ‘Guges,’ a prince of a Lydian royal family called ‘Mermnadae,’ whom the Assyrian king Assur-Bani-pal called ‘Gugu.’ Guges was an officer in the royal guards, close to the king; and in the year 685 B.C. he murdered his master from a competitive family of the Herculean dynasty, and took over the Lydian throne. He was a very rich man, gave great presents to the temple of Apollo in Delphi; but rebelled against the Greek cities in Asia Minor¹. In his old age, he was defeated by the Cimmerians or Gimirra, but managed to overcome them through the help of the Assyrians. Then, having aided Egypt to rebel against Assyria, he aroused the anger of the king of Assyria, who provoked the Cimmerians to invade the Lydian kingdom anew in 645 B.C.; and to kill the king, who was succeeded by his son Ardys.

Certain scholars believe that the name ‘Gog’ was connected to

¹ Herod. 1:7-15

and distorted from ‘Gaga,’ a long forgotten desolate province in Armenia and Cappadocia, that was mentioned in the Amarna tablets. That is why the name Gog has for a long time carried a barbarian sense. Other scholars believe that Gog referred to an Assyrian god by the name of Gaga; or to a ruler of the city of Sabi called ‘Gagi.’ And Assur-Banipal, the king of Assyria referred to this city.

MAGOG

The name refers to ‘Magog,’ the second son of ‘Japheth’ (Gen 10:12; 1 Chro 1:5); or the name of the land they have inhabited; most probably in the far north.

As ‘Gog’ is mentioned here as the prince of Mashech and Tubal, who made a fierce war against Israel on their return from captivity; joining forces with Gomer and Beth-Togarmah from the far north; it is believed that Magog are a people (or a land) in north Palestine, not far from Mashech and Tubal, their home land north-east of Cilicia, as it came in the Assyrian documents¹.

The Syrians called the land of Tatar by the name Magog; so did the Arabs to the land between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. Yet the majority adopted what came in Josephus, that Magog were the tribes of Scythians², referred to by Herodotus, as inhabitants of the lands north of Crimea³; and known for their fierce wars in Asia and other parts. In the seventh century, they invaded Sardis the capital of Lydia; defeated the king of Media; and when they reached Egypt, its king gave them a large ransom to stay away from his land. The prophet Ezekiel described them as mighty horsemen, all handling swords; conforming to what came in the Greek history. But, if we consider that Gog the prince of Magog, most probably refers to Guges the king of Lydia, all that would not apply to those tribes; unless the word ‘Magog’ here, carries a symbolic meaning, that refers to Gog, who was fond of attacking others, and known for his ferocity in battle.

THE SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION

As the names Gog and Magog came in the book of Revelation (20:8-10), representing a war made by armies from the four corners of

¹ *J. Hastings: Dictionary of the Bible, p. 612.*

² *Josephus: Antiq. 1:6.*

³ *Herodotus: 4:17-20, 47-58.*

the earth, under satanic leadership, to mislead humanity, and to make war against the saints, at the end of ages; some scholars interpreted what came in chapters 38 and 39 of the book of the prophet Ezekiel, that the names Gog and Magog should not be understood according to literal historical sense, but according to the symbolic sense.

a- Some believe that Gog refers to the Assyrians, to the Scythians, or even to Cambyses king of Persia, to Alexander the Great, to Antioch the Great, or to Antiochus Epiphanes etc.

b- Others believe that Gog the prince of Magog, refers to a military pact against the people of God.

c- Others believe that what came concerning Gog, does not refer to certain historical events; but symbolizes the spiritual war between Satan, who has dominion over many kingdoms, and God who reigns over the saints. And that in spite of the might and ferocity of Satan, yet the truth will prevail.

d- Some interpret Gog and Magog as symbols of Russia, basing their opinion on the word 'Rush,' an old name for Russia; the word Mashech, as a symbol of Moscow the capital of Russia; and the word Tubal as a symbol of Tubalt also in Russia. They believe that Persia refers to Iran; Cush to Ethiopia; and Put to Libya (Ez 38:5)... It is as though this prophecy refers to the afflictions that the Church will suffer at the end of ages on the hands of several nations under the leadership of Russia. As to Togarmah, they interpret as East Germany. That military aggression would be on the level of kings and peoples from all directions; but it would mostly come from the north; saying: *"Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army. You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days..."* (Ez 38:15). But those peoples would include kingdoms like Ethiopia, Libya, Sheba, Dedans, and Tarshish!

As to the word 'Israel,' although some scholars believe that it is a war directed toward Jerusalem; yet the majority believe that the word 'Israel' here, means the people believing in God. The war is directed against the Church as a whole, and not in a particular region; as it came in the book of Revelation: *"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison, and will go out to deceive the*

nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them” (Rev 20:7-9).

THE SITUATION OF THE CHURCH

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan. You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of enwalled villages; I will go to peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates’” (Ez 38:10, 11). It is as though the overall war in the end of days against the Church, would not be a reaction to a provocation by the Church against the enemy. But the enemy, when he sees the Church, calm and peaceful, he will assume that she is with no walls to protect her, and that she has neither bars nor gates; open and easy to plunder; He does not know that God Himself is the wall to the believer; embraces and protects him; and shuts him in by heavenly gates; that Satan and his hosts can not force open.

Yet, there is fear that the situation at the end of days, would be like that: as though the believers are in an open country, with no walls, bars, or gates; as the Lord says: *“Then many prophets will rise up and deceive many; and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Mat 24:11, 12); “For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand” (Mat 24:24, 25).*

A DANGEROUS ENEMY!

A dangerous enemy does his best to destroy Your Kingdom!
But You, O God, is greater than any enemy!

I am not a party in that battle; I hide in You;
To prevail and conquer by You!
The war of the enemy started since the creation of man;
And its heat increases until the antichrist comes!
It will grow, more and more fierce;
Until, if possible, the elect are deceived!
But You have promised:
“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

The enemy may be dangerous, but You are the Grantor of victory!
You did not deceive us; but You confirmed to us the ferocity of war;
And provided us with the secret of conquest and victory!

CHAPTER 39

THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH

In this chapter, God consummates His talk about 'Gog,' proclaiming his utter devastation; cleansing the land of His people from the corpses of Gog's army. Finally He ends His talk about the preparation for the Messianic reform, by proclaiming the goal of God from chastening His people; clarifying the difference between the punishment of Gog, the representative of Satan and his hosts, and the chastisement of the children of God; in whom God desires to be glorified.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- The perdition of Gog | 1-7. |
| 2- Cleansing the land | 8-16. |
| 3- The sacrificial meal for the birds | 17-25. |

1- THE PERDITION OF GOG

He once again confirms the ultimate perdition of Gog, being the sign of the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom over the kingdom of darkness.

It is amazing how God, in proclaiming His opposition against Gog, says: "*And I will turn you around and lead you on, bringing you up from the far north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel*" (Ez 39:2). As though the violence that Gog does against God and His children, is not hidden from God, but is allowed by Him, to glorify His name in His people.

Before allowing for their perdition, God will knock the bow out of his left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of his right hand (Ez 39:3). God did not start by judging Satan, but He first destroyed his authority; breaking down his evil weapons on the cross, in order to give His children the chance to prevail on him. The fall of Gog and all his troops and the peoples who were with him (Ez 39:4), on the mountains of Israel, is a proclamation of the location of the battle: the firm hearts of believers, which become like rocks, that would never shake before the temptations of Satan. As the Lord Christ defeated Satan on the mountain; so we enter with him in a battle within the heart, where he will be destroyed, and will have no more place in us. He intended to reign over the heart; but there, we have him fall, by the divine grace,

under our feet.

As Gog falls, he becomes prey for the believers who, by grace, exalt like birds and soar in the heavenliness. Those who practice spiritual war, become like mighty beasts before which sin cannot stand. As to the fire that consumes him; that is the fire of the divine Spirit that dwells in us, purifies us of every sin and weakness, and consumes every evil and satanic work. This is the source of our conquest over Satan: Our life, by Christ Jesus, soars toward the heavenliness; persists on practicing strife, with hearts flaring with the fiery Spirit of God.

2- CLEANSING THE LAND

The goal of destroying Satan and his hosts, is to bring believers into a state of ultimate peace; As Satan is cast into the everlasting fire, the believer enters the eternal kingdom; and subsequently becomes in no need for weapons, as there will be no more war nor enemy: *“They will set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years”* (Ez 39:9).

The figure 7 refers to the end and perfection. As the believers conquer, the devils are defeated, and there would be no place for uncleanness; the people would bury the corpses in “the valley of Hamon-gog” (or Abarim, i.e. passers-by, regions beyond or crossed over); to cleanse the land of those unclean corpses. The name of the city will also be ‘Hamonah,’ namely “a multitude;” as in it the multitude of the followers of Gog; namely of Satan, would be buried.

‘Abarim’ is a range of mountains, east of the Dead Sea and the Jordan River valley, so called because they are across the River. They are outside the sacred land; mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah among the mountains in Syria, Lebanon and Bashan (Jer 22:20); where the Hebrews dwelt before crossing the River of Arnon (Numbers 21:11); then given to the children of Reuben (Num 32:2-37). Mount Nebo was part of this mountain range. These mountains gave a panoramic view of the surrounding country. From Mount Nebo Moses surveyed the Promised Land before he died (Numbers 27:12; Deuteronomy 32:49; 34:1).

The Lord probably intended to proclaim that Gog’s multitude would be buried in Abarim, a reference to the conquest of God’s

children while still in the world, before crossing to the other life. They would, like the prophet Moses, go up on the mountain of Nebo, to see the heavenly Jerusalem, and behold the divine glories; to be cleansed by the Holy Spirit from every defilement, and to overcome all hosts of darkness.

The work of a believer in this life; as confirmed by this chapter, is to bury Gog's multitude; namely to bury the devils of darkness; to deny them any place in his heart.

"Whenever anyone sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon-gog" (Ez 39:15). By the marker he means a sign; as the believer, on seeing the marks of the falls of Satan, he makes the sign of the cross, the sign of conquest; in order that Satan would be completely buried in that valley, and would have no more place in him. Our mission is to holdfast to the sign of conquest and triumph, until we get crowned in the end.

3- THE SACRIFICIAL MEAL FOR THE BIRDS

By this end, He probably meant to clarify the difference between the fall of Gog's multitude in the holy land, and the great sacrifice in which many of His children died. While Gog's multitude would utterly come to an end in the eternal fire, the children of God would be chastised for a certain time, until they repent, then would return to God, to have His name glorified in them.

He probably meant by the great meal, there on the holy mountains, the slaughter of Gog's multitude that perished. Anyhow, the Lord has completely clarified the return of His children to Him by repentance and in an exalted peace; and God's jealousy for them for the sake of His holy name; *"I will not hide My face from them anymore; For I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel"* (Ez 39:29). By that, the book of Ezekiel comes to its final goal; the glory of God departed from His people and temple because of the sin; But now through chastisement, they return to Him repentant; and the glory of God returns to them; and His name is sanctified in them.

Now, in the following chapters, the divine glory is proclaimed, through the new temple, the new city, and the new people.

A CONQUEST AND A CROSSING

Gog, the symbol of Satan has the intention to destroy God's kingdom completely.

And his war will become more fierce in the end of ages!

But he, together with all his hosts, will be destroyed on the holy mountain!

The enemy will fall dead under the feet of believers; while they will get exalted to heaven itself.

Instead of reigning on the heart;

My heart will become a grave for him!

Instead of wounding me with his arrows, he will die by his same weapon!

O my Savior, When shall I conquer by the sign of Your cross?

When will the war come to an end.

And I am exalted to the bosom of Your Father;

There, I will need a weapon no more.

As the enemy would be no more!

There, I will behold the enemy, go down eternally into the fire of hell.

And behold Your believers enjoy Your glory and exalted peace!

THE SIXTH SECTION

REFORMING OF THE TEMPLE AND JERUSALEM

EZEKIEL 40 - 48

RELIGIOUS ORDAINMENT FOR THE MESSIANIC ERA

In these chapters (40-48) Israel is presented to us, not as a nation, but as a spiritual Church society, set upon the temple and its service. This section includes a single vision that extends along all these chapters; that although considered as the most difficult in the Holy Bible, yet if we understand it spiritually, it will prove to be the most sweet. This vision represents the return of God's glory that has previously departed from the holy temple and city; through establishing a new temple with new features and new possibilities, where the Lord dwells and from where He would never depart.

What came here of detailed description of the new temple, to be set in the Messianic era, with its huge size that could never be realized literally; reveals to us, that it bears a spiritual meaning; referring to the temple of the Gospel, to be set by the Lord Christ, who establishes it on His saintly apostles; proclaiming to us the spiritual worship through the symbols.

This section is crowded with details of the temple and its service: Its location, annexes, ordainments, number of tables on which sacrifices are to be slain, the temple ministers, and the rites of worship etc. These are things that undoubtedly fulfilled the heart of the prophet Ezekiel, the priest who was denied practicing his priestly work. A door of hope was opened before him, and he felt fulfillment within himself; not through a rigid rite, but through a spiritual ritual life of worship; in which there is no separation between the rite, on the one hand, the inner life, the deep fellowship with God, and the realization of the divine presence, on the other hand. The holiness in worship inside the temple, does not separate from the life by the Spirit (Ez 39:29). Still the Spirit has to express Himself. He saw in the new temple or the new city, "the dwelling place of God among His people."

These chapters dealt with:

- 1- The temple Chapters 40-43.**
- 2- Ministers of the temple; and the feasts 44-46.**
- 3- The holy land 47-48.**

I tried hard not to go into great details of the things concerning

the building and the contents of the temple; first for the sake of simplicity, and to avoid repetition, as all that was already dealt with in the interpretation of the book of Exodus.

CHAPTER 40

THE HOLY TEMPLE

This chapter talks about:

1- A general idea on the temple and the city	1-4.
2- The outer wall	5.
3- Gateposts for guards	6-16.
4- The outer court	17-27.
5- The inner court	28-38.
6- The eight tables	39-44.
7- Chambers for singers and priests	45-47.
8- The vestibule	48-49.

1- A GENERAL IDEA OF THE TEMPLE AND THE CITY

The Spirit of the Lord set the prophet Ezekiel on a very high mountain; on it toward the south was something like the structure of a very spacious city; that was at the same time the house of the Lord or His temple. It was called “a city,” as it is the dwelling place of the people, who are sanctified by dwelling with the Holy God, enjoying the glory of the Lord. And is called “a temple,” as it is the dwelling place of the Holy God, Who gathers His people around Him, sanctifying them, and glorified in them.

The prophet Ezekiel ended his book by this vision, he mentioned in great and accurate details; that he came to enjoy after a life full of bitterness and continuous sighs, on account of the sinners who deviated from the law of the Lord; who, because of their persistence on abominations and blood shedding, the glory of God departed from their city, and even from His temple itself. Yet, it was impossible for the prophet Ezekiel to enjoy that vision, unless the divine Spirit carries him up to the top of a very high mountain; where he brings him to the holy city. It is as if the prophet was lifted up by the Holy Spirit to the heavenliness, through the union with the Lord Christ, who exalts us up to the bosom of His Father. This is the goal of our faith; and this is the end of our vision; it is even the mission of our Christ, to set us forth by the Holy Spirit to the tops of the holy mountains; exalts us in Him, to bring us into the bosom of His Father, to be in, and together with Him forever.

How beautiful it is, for the prophet to end his message by proclaiming this joyful vision to his brothers, who live together with him under the humiliation of captivity, to provoke in them the memories of Zion, and its temple with its holy services, to motivate them toward repentance, to enter into a new temple through the Savior Messiah. Concerning this, **Origen** says: [Those captivated in that location said: “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion*” (Ps 137:1). Namely, they could not weep except after remembering Zion; as good memories causes man to feel the causes of his misery. Unless we remember Zion, and raise our eyes to the law of God, and toward the mountains of the Holy Bible, we shall not be able to weep¹.]

He was particular to say: “*He set me on a very high mountain*” (Ez 40:2); as he could not possibly climb that very high mountain, unless he is carried by God Himself; who lifts him up to the top. It is God’s work in us! There, “*toward the south*” (Ez 40:2), Ezekiel saw, not a city, but “*something like the structure of a city;*” as it was not man-made, nor built with worldly material, but it was something (like the structure of a city) built by the Lord Christ Himself; saying: “*He took me there, and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in His hand, and He stood in the gateway*” (Ez 40:3).

He is the Lord Christ, who, by His Spirit sets us up on the top of the holy mountain, to bring us to the divine sanctuaries, to dwell in the heavenliness and enjoy them. And as **Origen** says: [Let our thanksgiving be for the coming of Christ who took our souls away from the earthliness, and transferred them to care for the heavenliness, and to contemplate on spiritual facts. He destroyed all that seemed great on earth; and transferred the worship of God from the seen to the unseen, and from the temporal to the eternal².]

He saw Him in appearance like bronze; namely, full of shine, splendor, and power, trampling Satan under His feet, and crushing him forever. That is what St. John the beloved saw: “*His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace*” (Rev 1:15).

¹ In Num., hom 15:1.

² Ibid 23:1.

The prophet saw Him having a line of flax (linen) in His hand; that refers to His work in the life of His believers: sanctity and purity; and a measuring rod; that refers to the fact that He keeps His children, who are all known to Him (under His measurement) with no exception. Standing in the gateway, proclaims that there is no entry into that holy city except by Him; as He is *“the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”* He cries out: *“I am the Door, If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture”* (John 10:9). *“There is no salvation in any other”* (Acts 4:12).

The prophet noticed that the city was set toward the south; as the people then, were in Babylon or around it by the River Chebar; captivated by people who came from the north; So He is now bringing them back to their land, the land of promise, toward the south.

2- THE OUTER WALL

“Now there was a wall all around the outside of the temple. In the man’s hand was a measuring rod six cubits long and a hand breadth; and he measured the width of the wall structure, one rod; and the height one rod” (Ez 40:5).

The first thing Ezekiel saw in that holy city or the temple of God, was the outer wall. As God provides us with His Holy Spirit, a fiery wall that keeps the human soul as His sanctuary; nothing foreign or unclean would approach it; His divine Spirit Himself keeps it from all sides.

That wall also represents the spirit of Truth and discernment; the spirit that distinguishes between the divine holy life and the worldly life, attached to the love of temporal things. It is fitting for the believer to live sanctified for the Lord to have that divine Spirit, who leads him to know the Truth and to discern it from vanity; to know the righteousness of Christ, and discern it from the evil life; to accept in Him what is Truth, and what is Christ’s; and to keep out all what is foreign to the Spirit of Truth, namely is the Spirit of Christ.

In the book of Zechariah it came: *“For I, says the Lord, will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst”* (Zech 2:5); All the fiery arrows of the enemy could not go through it.

As to the measuring rod, there are two interpretations for its six cubits length: The first interpretation, adopted by many, was that each of its 6 cubits, equals a regular cubit plus a handbreadth; namely, about 22

inches. The other interpretation, was that the measuring rod was 6 regular cubits in length, all plus one handbreadth.

3- GATEPOSTS FOR GUARDS

The main gate is the one facing east; as it is the one leading to the sanctuary and the Holy of the Holies. Yet there are two other gates: one facing north and another facing south; with the same measurements like the one facing east; for all the world to enter into the sanctuaries of the Lord, with no discrimination between one nation and another, or between one race and another. These three gates refer to the Holy Trinity, through which the world enter into the holy city - the higher Jerusalem; namely, to union with Him; as man unites with God the Father in His Son through His Holy Spirit. These gates remind us of the twelve gates of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:13) - three gates on each side, that carry a general invitation to all believers in the whole world to come and enjoy the divine glories through the Holy Trinity. And as the Lord says: *“Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”* (Mat 8:11).

On the side of each of the three gates there are 6 chambers: 3 on each side; small and equal chambers used by the guards. If the holy building refers to the believing soul that unites with God the Father in His Son by His Holy Spirit, to become a sanctuary for the Holy Trinity. These chambers refer to the persistent watch on every side or at every gate: the gate to the spirit; the gate to the mind; and the gate to the body; So that nothing unclean would approach the spirit, the mind, or the body, with all its senses and energies. But the Lord Himself would enter to sanctify man as a whole: spirit, mind, and body. And as the Lord Himself says: *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming”* (Mat 25:13).

If God is the wall of the soul and its gate, He is also the One who watches over it, without denying the responsibility of the soul and its positive role in strict watching; not only by guarding against evil, but also by accepting the entry of the Lord Jesus Christ into it, to enjoy a permanent unity with Him.

Those little chambers are provided with beveled window frames in the gate chambers and in the intervening archways, all around on the inside. Through these little windows the watchman can look to the outside, to the inside, and upwards to behold heaven. It is as though

those chambers are not only for watching, but also for enlightenment: enlightenment with the exalted heavenly things, enlightenment for the inner soul, and enlightenment for the outer behavior. They are little windows, counted as very weak, if compared to our enlightenment when we come to cross over to heaven itself.

As to adorning the gateposts with palm trees; that refer to the righteous; as “*The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree*” (Ps 92:12). The palm tree was used as a unit in adorning the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:29); and its branches were used as a sign of triumph (John 12:13; Rev 7:9).

The roofs of the chambers were in the form of archways, referring to the fact that everything in man should bear a heavenly impression.

4- THE OUTER COURT

Around the court there is a pavement with 30 chambers facing it; to be used by the people in the days of feasts; seven steps leading up to their doors.

5- THE INNER COURT

To reach the outer court, man has to climb 7 steps; while to reach the inner court, he needs to climb 8 steps (Ez 40:31, 34, 37). As the more man approaches the divine presence, he is committed to rise up higher and higher, ascending by the Holy Spirit toward the heavenliness.

If the people, in order to reach the outer court, have to climb 7 steps; the priests; to reach the inner court, have to climb 8 steps more. A priest is committed to live, not like the common people, but to have deeper experience, and a shining heavenly behavior; to be counted indeed as a minister to the Lord.

St. Jerome was very interested in the issue of the 7 steps to the outer court, and the 8 steps to the inner court. He saw in the first, a reference to the Old Testament; and in the second a reference to the New Testament. By adding the two together, the total would be 15 steps, a reference to the ‘Psalms of Ascent,’ that we sing to lead us step by step until we enter the kingdom of heaven¹.

¹ *On Psalms, Homily 19.*

That is why those who cut the rocks for the construction of the temple were 70,000 and 80,000 men (1 Kings 5:15); namely men of the Old and of the New Testaments successively, who build the one holy house; being the holy temple of God.

St. Jerome says that the temple had 15 steps; the High Priest stands on the uppermost one, followed by the priests, then the Levites. He also says: [Behold, how this temple simulates the heavenly temple; as a celestial body exceeds another in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:41, 42). Blessed is he, who is worthy of standing on the fifteenth step in the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem; the exalted level, that I presume, is reserved for the apostles and martyrs. Therefore, let us pray to become worthy to be, at least, on the lowermost step in the temple of the Lord. They stand on the different steps of the temple, to sing in harmony, one psalm and one thanksgiving to the Lord. The steps may be different, but the praise for God is one and the same. That is as far as the heavenly Jerusalem is concerned; but concerning our present days, I think we are here in this world to be edified every day of our life. If one of us is on the lowermost step, let him be encouraged to reach the next one. And he who is on the second step, let him hope to reach the third! Blessed are the martyrs, who were worthy to ascend to the highest steps at the top. As for us, living in this world, we cannot climb all the steps at once, from the lowest to the highest. But it is fitting for us not to stay on the first step, but to struggle to reach the highest steps... That, I assume, is the meaning of the ladder of Jacob, that he saw as he was fleeing from his brother Esau¹.]

St. Jerome probably saw in the 7 steps a reference to the Old Testament; as the figure 7 refers to perfection; the Law of God is perfect and flawless. The figure 8 refers to the first day after the week; namely to the new heavenly life; or the resurrected life (the Lord resurrected on that first day). We have already explained the symbolism of the two figures 7 and 8, in several occasions².

6- THE EIGHT TABLES

Eight stone tables were found, on which to slay the burnt offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. These refer to

¹ On Psalms, Homily 41.

² تفسير سفر الرؤيا، (رؤ 13 : 18)؛ آباء مدرسة الإسكندرية، 1980، ص 18.

spiritual heavenly sacrifices; as the figure 8 refers to the heavenly life, or that past the present one. These sacrifices are offered in the heavenly Christ Jesus, after cleansing the heart and the hands; the inner purification of both the soul and the body together.

7- CHAMBERS FOR SINGERS AND PRIESTS

The sacrifice of the New Testament is going hand in hand with the continuous praise through the sacrifice of the Lord Christ. They are connected and integrated works: the sacrifice of praise and the liturgy of the Eucharist. They are actually one work; they are one spiritual heavenly praise, or let us say, one spiritual liturgy.

8- THE VESTIBULE

Through the vestibule, man comes to the sanctuaries; so that nobody may approach God's presence, haltingly and negligently; but with awe, he should quietly cross the vestibule; to forget all his worldly thoughts, and get ready to contemplate on the heavenliness.

SET YOUR HOLY TEMPLE IN ME

What can my soul desire, more than Your dwelling in it, O my Savior?!

To make it Your holy temple, the work of Your hand?!

Turn my heart into a holy city;

In it, and in Your presence, Your angels and Your saints get together!

In it, set Your holy temple;

In which the soul worship You, rejoicing together with Your creation!

Penetrate my depths; To make out of it, the very high mountain, that

Your prophet Ezekiel saw.

There, You hold in Your hand a line of flax and a measuring rod.

You Yourself measure the temple to fix its dimensions!

You are its Builder and Sanctifier!

How beautiful is that wall, with which You surround Your house?!

It is the fiery wall; through which all the fiery arrows of the enemy cannot go!

You are my wall, and the stronghold of my life!

What are these three gates, through which all nations enter?

But You, O the Holy Trinity?!

All of us unite with God the Father, in His Son, by the Holy Spirit!

This is the true Gate: Our Trinitarian faith!

By it, we enjoy the life of worship, so that we live in the heavenliness!

On both sides of each gate, there are six chambers for the gateposts.

Three on this side, and three on that!

It is the Trinitarian faith, that guards the soul, the body, and the Spirit!

O Holy Trinity, sanctify my body with all its feelings!

And my soul with all its energies, and my spirit with all its possibilities!

So as to be altogether kept by You, and a sanctuary for You!

How amazing You are, O my God!

You are the Gate, and You are the Gate Keeper!

By You, I enter into the sanctuaries; and in You, I take refuge against
the adversary enemy.

What are these numerous window frames in the building?

But a sign of alertness, through them, the guard watches!

They are a sign of enlightenment; through them we see the pledge of the
heavenliness!

What are these decorations? They are the palm trees, the signs of
conquest and enlightenment!

What is this beautiful archway? But a sign of the heavenly life in us!

Grant me, O Lord, hope to climb the steps; to ascend the seven steps of
the outer court ;

As Your believers in the Old Testament did, seeking perfection!

And to climb the eight steps of the inner court; as Your apostles in the
New Testament did, seeking what is beyond the time!

Set in me eight heavenly tables;

To fulfill my soul; by You; O the Unique Sacrifice!

Teach me to have my heart cleansed, and purified by Your blood;

To be always worthy of Your feast!

Set O Lord, chambers for singers and for priests, to connect the praise
with the sacrifice;

And to transform my life into a holy liturgy!

Set a vestibule along which I quietly walk;

through which I enter your temple;

Thus, I cast aside the worldliness, and contemplate on the heavenliness!

How amazing You are, O Who sets Your temple in me!

How beautiful You are, O who dwells in me!

CHAPTER 41

THE TEMPLE

The description mentioned here, needs some concentration; because of the difficulty that faced some of those who tried to interpret it.

1- The Temple

- a- Dimensions of its doorposts 1.
 - b- The entryway to the temple 2.
 - c- The wall and the side chambers 5-6.
 - d- The foundations of the chambers; their walls, and doors 8-11.
 - e- Dimensions of the temple 13.
- 2- The Holy of the Holies 3-4.
 - 3- A separate outer building 12-15.
 - 4- The building design 7; 16-17.
 - 5- The decorations 18-20.
 - 6- The altar of incense and the table 22.
 - 7- The doors 23-26.

1,2- THE SANCTUARY AND THE HOLY OF HOLIES

The dimensions of the sanctuary and the Holy of the Holies were as follows:

The sanctuary is 40 cubits x 20 cubits (Ez 41:2); while the Holy of the Holies is 20 cubits x 20 cubits (Ez 41:4). But these figures seem to include the chambers surrounding the building on all sides (Ez 41:5): north; south, and west (as the east side represents the gate or the entrance). Thus the dimensions of the whole building, except for the east are: (60 cubits on the north; 60 cubits on the south; 20 cubits on the west). So if the width of the surrounding chambers is 4 cubits, the building would have 33 chambers (Ez 41:6), that surround the sanctuary and the Holy of the Holies on the three sides: 15 chambers on the north side, 15 chambers on the south, and 3 chambers on the west.

It is to be noticed that the entryway is very wide (10 cubits Ez 41:2), to accommodate all who wish to enter to the sanctuaries of God, and to let all humanity enjoy the divine bosoms. In verse 3 it is to be noticed that the prophet Ezekiel did not enter the Holy of the Holies; It was not said: "He took me inside," but said: "*He went inside...*" as the

High Priest alone may enter it once every year; a reference to the Lord Christ the Most High Priest, Who alone can enter into the bosom of God the Father, offering His own blood as atonement for our sins, so that we may enter by and in Him!

The 33 chambers that surround the whole building, may refer to manhood of the Lord Christ, in whom the Divinity is hidden. Through it, the believers dwell as members in His body.

3- THE SEPARATE OUTER BUILDING

On the far west, beside the wall, there was a huge building (90 cubits x 70 cubits); that was probably used as a storehouse. Some believe that this is a prophecy about another building; namely, the Church of the Gentiles. As though God was waiting for the predestined time to receive everyone, through faith in Him, to enjoy the fellowship in the body of Christ.

4- THE BUILDING DESIGN

The walls at the base were very thick; then become thinner in the middle; and more so at the top; thus the higher we go up, the thickness of the wall becomes less; and the width of the structure increases (Ez 41:7). So is the Christian: the more his heart rises to heaven, the lighter would his body become (the wall); the more spacious his heart would be with love; and the more spacious his soul would be; for God to dwell in him with His kingdom and glories.

The Lord Christ carried our body hidden behind our wall (Song 2:9). Yet He did not carry it heavy with sins. But likened us in everything except for sin alone. That is why His body was light - not in the material sense, but the spiritual - He could walk on water and not drown (Mat 14:25); while the apostle Peter, when the sin of doubt entered his heart, his body became dense or heavy, and he almost drowned; but when the Lord held his hand and lifted him up, he became light, and the water could not drown him. The same thing the prophet Elisha did, when he threw the stick (the cross of Christ) in the water, and made the heavy iron ax float on the surface of the water. It is as though we do not need to take off the body - that is the wall - but to have it sanctified by our union with the body of Christ, our nature would be blessed in Him; our body would be much lighter; and our heart would

become more spacious for His Kingdom¹.

The whole building from the inside - the sanctuary and the Holy of the Holies - was paneled with wood from the ground to the windows, and on every wall all around etc. (Ez 41:16, 17), so that the whole building from inside would appear as though one single wooden unit, hiding behind it the versatile rocky structure. That is a proclamation of the unity of the one body of Christ, or of the resurrection of us all as one body hidden behind the cross; no one with any prominence over another. In the cross - as I said before² - there would be one vertical unity, and another horizontal one: unity of heaven with earth, and unity of the earthliness together. Concerning this, **St. Irenaeus** says: [The One who gathers all in Himself, was hanged on a tree³.] **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says: [The cross is the way to unite all the world⁴.] **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says: [On the cross, the Lord stretched His hands to embrace the far ends of the world⁵.] **St. Hippolytus of Rome** says: [The cross is Jacob's ladder; that tree of heavenly dimensions extended from earth to heaven as an eternal plant, to lift all the world up... and to embrace together various kinds of human nature.]

5- THE DECORATIONS

The two units of decoration are the cherubim and the palm tree: A palm tree between a cherub and another. Every cherub has two faces: a face of a man on one side, and the face of lion on the other (Ez 41:18, 19). It is a magnificent portrait of the Church that embraces humanity, holy in the Lord (the palm trees), united with the heavenliness, who do not stand passively, but gaze at us looking each with a face like humans; namely have our feelings; and another like a lion, a reference to their spiritual strength, and their help to us in Christ Jesus.

6- THE ALTAR OF INCENSE AND THE TABLE

Here, the altar of incense appears as being made of wood; as it refers to our prayers risen in the presence of God through the cross. The table refers to the altar of the New Testament, on which the sacrifice of

¹ راجع للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، 1981، ص 95.

² Cf. *The Commentary on Ez 37:15-28*.

³ *Adv. Haer. 5:17:4*.

⁴ المؤلف الكنيسة بيت الله، 1979، ص 333.

⁵ *Cat. Lect. 13:28*.

the Eucharist - the bread of life - is offered.

7- THE DOORS

These doors are more spacious than those of the Old Testament; as the way to heaven is opened before all nations through the preaching of the gospel.

THE NEW TEMPLE

Set in me the sanctuary and the Holy of the Holies; Dwell in me;
And let my heart be filled with love for Your saints and Your angels.

What are these 33 chambers that surround the temple;
But a symbol of Your manhood; You who lived those years among us?!

What is that spacious door, but to accommodate every man;
To enter into Your Father's bosom?!

How amazing is the design of Your temple:
It starts very thick at the base; then gets thinner with height.
Will You lift up my heart, to relieve me of the weight of my body!
To become light, lifted up by the Spirit;
The waters of the world would be unable to devour me!
You paneled the whole building with wood, to turn it into an amazing
unit, as one single wooden unit!
Surround my brothers and I by the wood of Your cross, the Grantor of
life and reconciliation.

You adorned the temple of my heart by units of Cherubim and palm
trees. As though by the unity of the heavenliness with the saints.
Each cherub has two faces: one like human and another like a lion;
I see the heavenliness as though they are humans who share my love;
I see them also like lions that strongly watch over me;
May glory be to You, Who connected us to Your heavenly creation!

How beautiful is the wooden altar of incense?!
On it I offer my prayers in the worthiness of the wood of the cross!
How beautiful is the table?!
From which I get fulfilled by Your holy body and precious blood!

How spacious are the doors of Your new temple!
Spacious enough to invite all humanity to the heavenly gospel life!

CHAPTER 42

THE HOLY CHAMBERS FOR THE PRIESTS

In this chapter he talks about the following:

- 1- The holy chambers for the priests** 1-12.
- 2- Their uses** 13-14.
- 3- The outer dimensions of the whole structure** 15-20.

1- THE HOLY CHAMBERS FOR THE PRIESTS

The prophet Ezekiel enjoyed the entry into the sanctuary, that represents the place for the communal worship; and the Holy of the Holies, that he saw without entering it; as it represents the atoning work of the Lord Christ, that brings us in Him to the bosom of God the Father. Now the Spirit brings him out into an outer building toward the north, and into another toward the south, that include the chambers for the priests, that he calls the “*holy chambers*” (Ez 42:13). These chambers are inside the walls of the temple, although they have their holy status; yet are amalgamated with the building of the temple itself and is complementary to it. They represent the private worship in the inner chamber. The true spiritual worship, namely, the unity with God, in His Son, by the Holy Spirit, is not realized by either the communal worship or the private worship alone; but is realized through the worship as one integral life, practiced by man together with the congregation, as one of its living member; and also practiced with his family, and privately in his retreat, without separation from his fellowship in the congregation. This is our Church concept of the life of worship. It is one life lived by the believer, sharing with his brothers in worship, through his personal secret relationship with God; and worshipping in his inner chamber as a living member in the holy congregation, namely, there is no duplication in worship: communal and individual, but it is one integrated unit.

The building is more spacious in the middle than below, then becomes more spacious in the higher part; as the wall becomes thinner the higher it gets, to give the higher stores more space. As we said in the previous chapter, the higher man rises by the Holy Spirit, the lighter will the weight of the needs and earthly temporal desires of the body (the wall) becomes; and the more spacious for love will the heart be.

The presence of 3 stores (Ez 42:3, 6): lower, higher, and a middle one, reminds us of what **Origen**¹ says in his talk about the three kinds of interpretation of the word of God: the bitter literal interpretation, that represents the lower store, with its narrow space and very thick walls, as it makes the soul narrow, and the mind less spacious, while the body becomes heavier. In the spiritual interpretation, on the other hand, the soul sets forth into the inner chamber of the Groom, to recognize His secrets; the heart becomes spacious with love; and the body will not represent a real burden on it. The third kind of interpretation, namely the moral, stands in the middle. According to **Origen**, these three kinds of interpretation correspond to the ark of Noah with its three stores: the lower store for the unclean animals; the middle one for the clean animals; and the uppermost store where Noah and his family dwelt in the heights in a fellowship with God.

If the whole building was paneled inside with wood, to appear as one unit - one body in the crucified Christ; those numerous chambers, amalgamated with it, proclaim that in the glory, although we all represent one body, yet, *“one star differs from another star in the resurrection from the dead”* (1 Cor 15:41). Indeed everyone rejoices in being in the Bosom of God the Father, united in His Son, by the Holy Spirit; and rejoices for the glory of his brothers, for the sake of the exalted nature of love that works in us there with no hindrance. Yet, *“There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars”* (1 Cor 15:41). In heaven, St. Mary the *Theotokos* appears with more glory than all the earthliness and the heavenliness. And the apostles, the disciples, the prophets, and the martyrs have their glories for the sake of their sufferings, and their testimony to God even till blood, and so on.

The Lord says: *“In My Father’s house are many mansions”* (John 14:2). That is why everyone of us strives, not to surpass his brothers in glory, but to reach a deeper fellowship with God, and to unity in Him, so as to reach to *“the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13).

2-THEIR USES

The priests used those chambers for two things:

¹ راجع للمؤلف: آباء مدرسة الإسكندرية الأولون؛ العلامة أوريجينوس - الكتاب المقدس ، طبعة 1980.

- a- To eat the most holy offerings and come closer to God.
- b- To keep the garments in which they minister.

It is as though the goal of our encounter with the Lord Christ in our chambers, is to enter into a fellowship and a practical experience with God. To eat and get fulfilled with His word, to grow every day in the new life, that became ours in Him. And also to get clothed with Christ, as a garment of righteousness, by whom alone we can encounter God the Father, to receive our prayers, our fasting, and all our worships, in our Lord Christ Jesus.

3- THE OUTER DIMENSIONS OF THE WHOLE STRUCTURE

He measured the dimensions of the whole structure to find it very spacious: 500 measuring rods on every side; a square building like the one seen by St. John the beloved (Rev 21); that can accommodate the whole humanity; where everyone can find a place for himself.

Despite its great space, that proclaims the extent of God's longing to gather in it all humanity; Yet He made for it a wall, "*to separate the holy... from the common*" (Ez 42:20). God's love, His long-suffering, and the great width of His kingdom, does not mean that the unworthy - the slothful and the unrepentant - can freely enter into it.

A WORSHIP IN THE INNER CHAMBER

What is that outer building annexed to the temple,
But the personal worship in the inner chamber,
that goes hand in hand with the communal worship?!
Teach me to worship You among the congregation;
And to encounter You in secret!
Among the congregation I shall keep my personal relationship with You;
And in my inner chamber I shall keep praying for the sake of the
congregation!

What are these three stores of the outer building?
But the ladder that lifts me up to enjoy unity with You?!
Lift me up from the narrow and thick lower store.
Lift me upward to enjoy the spacious heart and the light spirit!
Grant me the two wings of a dove, to fly up to heaven!

What are the priests doing in that building?

They eat the most holy offerings, they are allowed to eat;
You are the heavenly Bread!
And they put on the holy garments. You are our eternal Garment!
By You we are fulfilled; and in You we hide; You O Lover of mankind!

CHAPTER 43

THE RETURN OF GOD'S GLORY

This chapter talks about:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- God's glory in His temple | 1-6. |
| 2- Conditions of the divine presence | 7-12. |
| 3- The altar of the burnt offerings | 13-17. |
| 4- Consecration of the altar | 18-27. |

1- GOD'S GLORY IN HIS TEMPLE

The Spirit brings him to the gate that faces toward the east (Ez 43:1); at the same place from which the cherubim chariot - God's fiery chariot - set forth to heaven, to depart from the house of the Lord (Ez 10:10); and from the whole city (Ez 11). Now the prophet, whose whole life was embittered because of the departure of God's glory from His people, regains his breath; and his mission got crowned with success; the whole book reaches its climax, and God's goal in us is realized.

We can say with no exaggeration, that the book of Ezekiel is the book of "God's glory." It starts with the proclamation of the divine glory. The Spirit of the Lord is revealed in every way; warning that God's glory would depart from the people because of their adopted of the idolatry worship, their abominations, bloodshed, following the counsel of false prophet and prophetesses, and the preoccupation of the priests with their personal interests at the expense of their flocks etc. Ultimately the glory of the Lord departed from His temple and His city (Ez 10, 11), as the temple and the city were defiled. The Lord chastened His people by captivity, hunger, and the destruction of their cities, to provoke them to repentance, in order to return His glory to them. And finally He destroyed their outside enemy (Ez 25-32), promised them to give them back His glory; presented Himself to them a Shepherd instead of their wicked shepherds (Ez 34); provoked them to repentance lest they perish (Ez 36); and promised to set for them a new temple, a new city, and a new king - a Son of David. All that was for the sake of the return of "God's glory" in their midst.

It is indeed the book of "God's glory;" an expression that came 14 times in the first 11 chapters. And now, He concisely describes this return; clarifying the following points:

a- The divine glory came from the east, proclaiming that its return to the human nature, is to be realized by the coming of the Lord Christ, who is called the “Sun of righteousness,” who persistently arises to scatter the darkness (Mal 4:2). That is why the deacon, in the holy Liturgy cries out saying, “Look towards the east.” And the Church received the tradition to pray in all its liturgies, as well as at home and personal worship looking towards the east. Even in Europe, some of the cemeteries were so built, that the faces of the dead are set towards the east. The martyrs and the saints used to look towards the east, when the time comes to deliver their spirits to the Lord¹.

b- In its return, the glory of God here, does not appear in a cloud, as it did in the tabernacle of the meeting or in the temple of Solomon (Exod 40:34; 1 kings 8:10). His glory in His new Church, is not proclaimed through a cloud of symbols and shadows, but is proclaimed through the Only-begotten Son Himself; as humanity encountered with God the Father in His Son, without hindrance.

c- The glory of God appeared through two things: the power of the word, and the splendor; He says: “*The glory of God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory*” (Ez 43:2).

His word is active and strong, proclaimed like the sound of many waters; namely works among many peoples (waters) and nations to draw them to Him. The activity of this glory is the enlightenment; the land that lived so long under darkness would shine. And as the apostle Paul says: “*For you were once darkness, but you are now light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*” (Eph 5:8). “*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love*” (Col 1:13). And St. Peter says: “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9).

d- The prophet Ezekiel saw the same glory he previously saw by the River Chebar (Ez 1). And as he fell on his face in the first time (Ez 1:28), and the Spirit entered him, and set him on his feet to speak to him (Ez 2:2); now he likewise, fell on his face (Ez 43:3), and was carried by

¹ راجع للمؤلف: الكنيسة بيت الله، 1979، فصل 5، المبنى الكنسي والاتجاه للشرق.

the Spirit of the Lord to the inner court. No man can enjoy the divine glory, and enter into vision and hear the voice of the Lord, without the Holy Spirit, that was promised by the Lord, saying: *“He will take of what is mine and declare it to you”* (John 16:14).

Actually scholars consider Ezekiel as ‘the prophet of the Holy Spirit,’ as they consider Isaiah as ‘the prophet of the Son,’ and Jeremiah as ‘the prophet of God the Father.’ There is no talk by the prophet Ezekiel without the proclamation of the work of the Holy Spirit.

2- CONDITIONS OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE

a- The return of God’s glory to His temple, the place of His throne, and the place of the soles of His feet, to dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever (Ez 43:7), has been actually realized by the coming of the incarnate Only-Begotten Son, in our midst; who *“has broken down the middle wall of division (animosity) between us”* (Eph 2:14, 15). This divine work is realized through the renewal of the divine covenant with man; in which God the Father has offered His Only-Begotten Son as an atonement for our sins; and in which we also are committed to act as is fitting for that great work by means of His divine grace. That is why God warns His people and their kings against defiling His holy name again (Ez 43:7); or else He would count that as taking lightly, God’s long-suffering and love. The apostle Paul says: *“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:29- 31).

b- If God proclaimed to them the return of His glory, to put in them the Spirit of hope; Yet, in order to enjoy this, and to recognize the dimensions of the temple, the secrets of His house, its ordinances and mysteries, they are committed first to repent (Ez 43:9-11): *“Now let them put their harlotry and the carcasses of their kings far away from Me; and I will dwell in their midst forever”* (Ez 43:9). Repentance is the way to be worthy of the dwelling of God in our midst, and of recognizing His divine secrets.

c- As His house is sanctified, the whole mountain is sanctified; saying: *“This is the law of the temple: The whole area surrounding the*

mountain top shall be Most Holy” (Ez 43:12). Let us then have our heart sanctified, so that our whole body and our souls will be sanctified, then God will sanctify all who are around us! The true believer is a source of blessing to all who are around him!

3- THE ALTAR OF THE BURNT OFFERINGS

Talking about the return of God’s glory, He mentioned first the repentance as the way to enter into the Holy of the Holies; but only through the holy sacrifice; as though the sacrifice is the basis of the entry of God’s glory in our life. And as **Fr. Methodeus of Olympia** says: [Day after day, the Church grows in stature and beauty, through her unity and cooperation with the Logos who descends to us till now, and continues to do so in remembrance of His passions¹.] **St. John Chrysostom** says about the sacrifice of the Lord Christ; namely, the Eucharist: [Through it, the soul is sanctified; and by it, it is beautified and flares².]

It is to be noticed, that the altar here, is bigger than it used to be before captivity (Ezra 3:3): 6 square yards at the top, 7 square yards at the base, and 4.5 yards high; It has a bench one yard high from the ground, on which some priests sit to minister; and another bench, some two yards away, on which others sit; the sacrifice is presented to those sitting on the first bench, who hand it to those sitting on the other, to place it on the altar.

4- CONSECRATION OF THE ALTAR

For consecration of the altar, a daily sacrifice should be offered for 7 days (Ez 43:25); as a reference to the work of the Lord Christ, consistently slain all along the week of our life; to wipe out our sins completely; to leave no place for them in us, all along the days of our sojourn. On the eighth day, God’s pleasure will start (Ez 43:27); as though the secret of His pleasure is, that we enter by the Lord Christ into the new heavenly life (the eighth day; namely, on the first day of the new week); which is the day of resurrection of the Lord Christ from the dead. In it we rise, would be justified before God the Father, and counted as sitting with Him in the heavenliness.

Throwing salts on the sacrifice (Ez 43:24), refers to the divine

¹ *Banquet 3:8.*

² *In Joan, hom 4.*

grace; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one”* (Col 4:6). The grace of God is the salt that seasons the tongue, all the members of the body, its senses, and feelings, as well as the soul with all its energies, and the mind.

Lastly the ministering Levites are of the seed of Zadok (Ez 43:19); who are said to approach Him; Zadok means “the righteous.” Approaching the altar of God should be through the enjoyment of the righteousness of Christ, to be in His eyes, spiritually, of the seed of Zadok.

THE DIVINE GLORY IN US

Great is the joy of Your prophet Ezekiel!
He has realized his goal!
Your glory that departed from the temple and the city has now returned!
Your glory returned from the east;
So as to rise in me, O the Sun of Righteousness!
To scatter my darkness by your amazing light!
To come with Your glory, not through the clouds;
Not through the symbols and shadows;
But by the dwelling of Your Holy Spirit in me!
The voice of the coming of Your glory, was like the sound of many
waters!
The earth shone and became full of splendor!
Come with Your glory in me. Let Your voice thunder in me!
Let all the foundations of evil tremble before You!
Shine with Your splendor in my depths;
To make me enjoy an exalted spiritual beauty!
Let Your glory come to my inner depths;
I confess my iniquities to You; And admit my reproach!
I know that repentance is the way of Your royal glory!
And the holiness is the eye that beholds Your splendor!
Set Your altar in me; And sanctify it with Your precious blood!
Your glory is connected to Your cross!
Here I am carrying it by and with You; O, You Bearer of the sins of the
world by Your cross!

Jerome says: [St. Mary is the eastern gate, of whom Ezekiel spoke; always shut, always shining, and always sealed. At the same time it is the Holy of the Holies; through which the “Sun of Righteousness” (Mal 4:2) enters and goes out; He who is “*called the High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek*” (Heb 5:10). Let him who doubts my words, explain to me how Jesus entered through the closed doors; and how he allowed his disciples to touch His hands and His side, to prove to them that He has a true body of flesh and bones, and not an imaginary one (Luke 24:39). Then, I shall clarify, how St. Mary could be a mother and a virgin at the same time¹.] We have already discussed this issue of permanent virginity of St. Mary in our book: “St. Mary according to the Orthodox concept.”

As to saying, “*In it He sits to eat bread before the Lord,*” this is a reference to the divine incarnation; by which the Son of God became man.

2- KEEPING CHARGE OF THE TEMPLE

The Lord entered with His glory into His house through the eastern gate, that He kept shut; by it no other man except Him shall enter. But He left the other gates open for everyone who wishes to unite with Him. Yet He did not leave these gates, spacious before all, and open by His divine love, without watching, but appointed the Levites to guard them.

In firm admonition, the Lord revealed to the Levites their previous trespasses; not only to avoid repeating them in the future; but much more to make up for the evil past years, by positive strife, on the account of the kingdom of God. It is as though their repentance, does not stop at forsaking evil, but rather extends to committing themselves to use their energies, talents, and time, that have worked on the account of evil, be used on the account of the Kingdom of God. He concentrates their faults in two categories:

1- Their negligence in guarding the house of the Lord, and setting others to keep charge of the sanctuaries on their behalf (Ez 44:8); that caused foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and flesh to defile His house! There is nothing more that causes bitterness to God’s heart, than to see His house where the mysteries of His holiness are, neglected by priests and ministers; to turn, into a place for evil! God in the Old and

¹ *Epist. 48:21.*

New Testaments has often warned that, whoever corrupts the temple of the Lord, will be corrupted by God. I say this with bitterness, as we often take the sanctuaries of God lightly, and mix love and compassion for the sinners, with negligence of God's sanctuaries.

Negligence in guarding the house of the Lord, commits the Levites to repent before resuming their responsibilities!

2- As the Levites have ministered to the people, who went astray after their idols (Ez 44:10); so they are committed to repent, by slaying burnt offerings and sacrifices for the people's sake, to restore them to the Lord. In our repentance, it is fitting for us, not only to rise from our falls, but also to bring back those who stumbled because of us; that would be through our holy ministry to them in the Lord.

3- STATUTES CONCERNING PRIESTS

God chose the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of His sanctuaries, when the children of Israel went astray, to have alone the right of standing before His holy altar, and to minister to him. God cared to set for them some special statutes to deal with their life, of which are:

a- **Their garments:** *"Whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, they shall put on linen garments, no wool shall come upon them while they minister"* (Ez 44:17). Wearing linen garments while ministering is a sign of purity; banning wool is for fear that it might be the product of a dead animal; God does not want His ministers to enter His sanctuaries bearing any trace of dead thing; they should also avoid to clothe themselves with anything that causes them to perspire (Ez 44:18). The minister of the altar should be always active and fresh.

He also commanded them to take off their garments in which they have ministered, and leave them in the holy chambers; as it is unfitting for them to carry out any human activity, while still wearing the holy garments.

Wearing linen garments while ministering in the sanctuaries, refers to our wearing of the Lord Christ Himself; as He alone is the Good Shepherd, the High Priest, by, and in whom, we perform the priestly work.

b- **Their hair:** He requested from them not to be extremists. They should not shave it altogether like the priests of the Gentiles; nor to let it grow long, the way the Nazirites do. They shall keep their hair well

trimmed. If the priest of the New Testament dedicates his heart and life completely for ministry; yet, in his appearance, he should act rationally; by being a role model for the people, he would be able to gain many, by his behavior that reflects his fellowship with the Lord.

c- **Food and drink:** They shall not drink wine when they enter the inner court (Ez 44:21). In the New Testament the apostle Paul says: “*he (the bishop) must be not given to wine*” (1 Tim 3:1, 3). **St. Jerome** comments, saying: [Being given up to wine is one of the faults of the greedy and the loose. When the body becomes hot by wine, lust will be inflamed in him. Drinking wine implies letting the soul have its own ways in the enjoyment of pleasures, that could lead to breaking chastity; “*He who lives in pleasure, is dead while he lives*” (1 Tim 5:6); while he who drinks wine, is not only dead but buried. One hour of looseness made Noah, the dignified 60 years old, uncovered in his tent (Gen 9:20, 21)¹.]

God commanded the priest to refrain from eating a dead animal or bird, nor a prey (Ez 44:31). He wants the priest to have a chaste soul. Eating a dead animal or a prey is a sign of a low soul. He probably also means that the priest should subsist on the word of God, that revives and sanctifies his body and spirit; and should reject the preaching of heretics, that would make his body (symbolized by the animal), and his soul (symbolized by the bird), dead or prey to the devil. Let the priest drink from the living spiritual fountains, to keep the germs from penetrating into his life, and then into those of his people.

d- **Marriage:** The priest should care for the dignity of his priestly work; by not marrying a widow or a divorcee, so that nobody can doubt his integrity. Yet he was allowed to marry the widow of a priest (Ez 44:22).

In the Orthodox Church, a priest is strictly not allowed to marry after getting the sacrament of priesthood. As he became a father, he should consider all girls and women as his daughters; and a father should never marry his own daughter.

e- **Preaching:** A priest should be capable of “*teaching his people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to*

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 668.

discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ez 44:23). He should be just, and should, in controversy, “judge according to my judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings; and they shall hallow My Sabbaths” (Ez 44:24).

Concerning teaching **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The apostle Paul instructed that a Bishop should be “*able to teach*” (1 Tim 3:2). This is an important requirement for him, who takes the responsibility of shepherding¹.]

f- **Grieving for the dead:** God requested from the priest not to defile himself by touching a dead person, unless it is his father, mother, son, daughter, brother, or unmarried sister; then he should complete 7 days cleansing himself, offer a sin offering before going to minister in the sanctuary (Ez 44:25-27). He wants the priest to raise himself above everything temporal, to attach his heart to the heavenliness, and to refrain from grieving for a departed. Yet He allowed it for the close relatives mentioned, for the sake of human feelings, that could not be disregarded in the life of a priest.

g- **Their subsistence:** God did not allow His priests to accept a portion of inheritance with their brothers, in the Promised Land; He presented Himself to them as their inheritance. And He is committed to fulfill all their spiritual and physical needs. He commanded the rest of the tribes to give them the tithes and first fruits; as though given to God Himself.

Origen comments on God’s words that He is their inheritance (Ez 44:28), saying: [Their portion is not on earth, but the Lord Himself is their portion and their inheritance. They represent those who do not fail because of some physical limitation, but go beyond the glory of things seen; and put in the Lord all their life with all its requirements; Those who do not seek carnal things, but seek the wisdom and the knowledge of God’s secrets; “*For where their treasure is, there their heart will also be*” (Mat 6:21). Therefore they have no inheritance on earth, but are lifted up to what is above heaven. There, they would be together with the Lord forever, in His word, wisdom, and the pleasure of His knowledge; fulfilled with His sweetness; He would be their food, dwelling place, wealth, and kingdom. That is the destiny; and these are

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 686.

the possessions acquired by those who have God as their only inheritance¹.]

That is concerning God as their inheritance; but as far as first fruits are concerned, all would be theirs (Ez 44:30). **Origen** comments on this, saying: [According to the Law, the first fruits of plants and animals should be given to the priests. Anyone who possesses a field, a vineyard, or an olive garden; works the land, or raises beasts, should present all the first fruits to God through the priests; as according to the holy Scripture, whatever presented to the priests is as though presented to God Himself. Therefore we are instructed by the Law, that it is not lawful to benefit from the fruits of the land nor of the beasts, even the little domestic ones, unless we present all their first fruits to God through the priests. I believe that we are committed to obey this statute, like many others, even according to its strict literal sense².]

Origen lifts up our spiritual mind to see the Lord Christ Himself as the greatest High priest, to whom spiritual first fruits should be offered; like “the first fruits of Achaia” (Rom 16:5), and like that offered by Cornelius, not only to the Church of Caesarea, but also to that of all the Gentiles. The virgins, and the men who were not defiled with women (Rev 14:6), are counted as first fruits offered to the Greatest High Priest our Lord Jesus Christ; Not only the virgins in the body, but also those virgins in the spirit, like the wise virgins who were waiting for the Bridegroom in the middle of the night. And as **Origen** says: [As we said, let each of us yearn to grow to become elected from among the first fruits, to be offered to God, and to be the portion of the Lord³.]

The source of our first-rate status is our union with the Lord Christ - the true “First fruit; In Him we become first fruits, and counted for God the Father, as a portion of His Greatest High Priest Jesus Christ. That is why the Lord Christ offers Himself on our behalf as a First fruit to God. **Origen** says: [He is called the “First fruit” (1 Cor 15:23); the “First fruit among those who have fallen asleep;” the “King of Kings;” the “Lord of Lords;” the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4); and the “High Priest.” We can also call Him “The First fruit of the first fruits.” He is the First fruit, offered not to the High Priest, but to God Himself; “*He*

¹ *On Num., hom., 21:1.*

² *On Num., hom., 11:1.*

³ *On Num., hom., 11:5.*

has loved us and given Himself to us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma” (Eph 5:2); and after His resurrection from the dead, He sat at the right hand of God (Col 3:1)¹.

In the Old Testament, man was committed to offer the first fruits to God through the priests, in order to get the pleasure of God. The priests used to eat the first fruits, or consume them. But in the New Testament, God presents the First fruit “Jesus Christ” to His people, to eat His body, drink His precious blood, and receive His life in them; not to consume Him, but to enjoy the power of His resurrection, that grants us life. That is why **Origen** says: [The first fruit that was offered in the Law, was consumed as food... But we, the more we eat of this food, the more it will be².]

THE PRINCE WORKING IN THE TEMPLE

You are the Prince who enters the temple, while the gate is shut!
You enter and sit in it, and the gate remains shut!
You are the Virgin, born by the virgin; whose virginity stays intact!
Enter into my depths, O the One who works in me;
Enter and sit, You who possess the key of the heart!
Enter into it; and shut my gate before all evil!
Who works in the temple of my heart and can sanctify it but You?
Who are the Levites who keep charge in me,
But those talents You granted me?!
You sanctify them and let them grow!
Grant them to be honest in their charge.
You are the great High Priest;
You made us kings and priests for Your Holy Father.
Grant us the white linen garments; that will not be defiled!
Keep us in our spiritual food and drink!
Let us not plunge in the iniquities of this world!
Allow us to unite with You, as a holy bride with no wrinkle!
Indeed what portion should I have but You?!
You are my life, resurrection, and treasure!
To whom shall I offer myself as a portion, but to You, the Infinite Love?

¹ *On Num., hom., 11:4.*

² *On Num., hom., 11:6.*

CHAPTER 45

THE STATUTE OF HOLINESS, JUSTICE, AND REJOICING

After God presented to His people a new temple, set in it priests who walk in His righteousness, and Levites who keep watch over its gates, He started to proclaim the statute of this new temple, that is set mainly on three important principles: Holiness, Justice, and rejoicing.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- Holiness and dividing the holy city | 1-8. |
| 2- Justice and truth in the new city | 9-17. |
| 3- Rejoicing in the new city | 18-25. |

1- HOLINESS AND DIVIDING THE HOLY CITY

a- The Lord says: *“when You divide the land by lot into inheritance, you shall set apart a district for the Lord, a holy portion of the land... It shall be holy throughout its territory all around”* (Ez 45:1).

How amazing is God’s love; who promises to grant His children a new land, after their return from captivity; then asks man to give Him a lot of land out of what he has given him, as an offering from man to God; that would be the source of making the whole land holy. He asks for a little of what He gave us, as though it is our own, to sanctify all what we have, because of this offering.

God accepts that land from us; although all the land is His; makes of it a personal possession; a holy sanctuary, where He dwells in the midst of His people to sanctify them.

This carries a symbolic portrait of what took place in the New Testament. The Sanctuary is the Lord Christ, God’s Only-Begotten Son; He took our body and nature in Him, for God the Father to receive from us, a sacrifice of love, that He will accept and be pleased with; to receive all of us in Him. He receives that Holy One on behalf of humanity; so that humanity that believes in Him, through its unity with and in Him, would be sanctified. That is why **St. Cyril the Great** says: [We were all in Christ; and the human personality in its wholeness was renewed in Him¹.] [He carried us in His body; as we all were in Him, having been

¹ PG 73:161.

proclaimed a Man¹.] And **St. Athanasius** says: [The Logos Himself, was not in need for the opening of the gates of heaven... But we were the ones needing that; we who were carried in His body².] The Lord Christ was, and still is the source of our holiness, as He mystically carried us in Him.

The new temple also carries a symbolic portrait of what takes place in the human soul, or in man. If the Holy of the Holies represents the heart in which our Lord Jesus Christ dwells; the temple symbolizes the body that is sanctified, through the dwelling of our Lord in the soul; the same way the whole temple is sanctified through the Holy of the Holies. The dimensions of the temple, were 500 yards on every side, in memory of the 5 wise virgins (Mat 25) ; or of the sanctification of the 5 senses of the body, as virgins to the Lord our God. The priests who dwell around the temple, refer to the holy worship, offered by man in Christ Jesus; While the Levites refer to the necessity of strict watchfulness on the gates of both the soul and body, so that no foreign thing, that is not fitting for the sanctuaries of God, would enter. The prince, refers to the holy mind that controls everything according to the will of God. While the congregation refer to the energies and apparent works of the body, as everything in us would become holy, to work on the account of the kingdom of God.

b-The Lord assigned the portions of the priests, the Levites, the people, and the king; so that no one will take what belong to others; and no one will abuse his authority on the expense of his brother. No holiness without justice and consideration of the rights of others.

2- JUSTICE AND TRUTH IN THE NEW CITY

The ordinance of the holy land is justice, no oppression or violence. This is the feature of the soul that receives God in it as the source of its sanctification; that is why the Lord commands those of authority as such: “*Remove violence and plundering; execute justice and righteousness; and stop dispossessing my people,*’ says the Lord God.’ *You shall have just balances, a just ephah and a just bath*” (Ez 45:9, 10) Nothing would grieve the heart of God like oppression and cheat; and nothing would please Him like mercy and justice.

¹ PG 74:432.

² PG 25:140.

This is the law of the Church, that finds in her Christ, the divine justice realized; the balances of God are all just. He carried our trespasses, and paid our debts; and as the apostle says: *“And you being dead in your trespasses, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it”*(Col 2:13-15). In the balances we were found wanting; so He paid our dues; not just with words or emotions, but He paid for them with His life for our salvation; to have the divine justice realized in Him. By destroying violence and oppression, which are the law of the devil, Satan together with all his principalities and powers were disarmed, and were made a public spectacle.

For this reason, He talked about the law of justice and not cheating in the offerings, sacrifices, and burnt offerings (Ez 45:15); as being a symbol of the sacrifice of the Lord Christ, in which the divine justice is realized.

3- REJOICING IN THE NEW CITY

If the foundation of the Church is the holiness that came to be ours in the holy Christ, and its law is the justice that was realized in His sacrifice, its sign is: “rejoice” in the Lord. That is why God talks to them about their continuous feasts. The life of the Church is a continuous “feast,” and a heavenly joy, that no world events can take them away.

Christianity is not depression nor boredom or bitterness; but in its essence, it is an inner joy realized as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5); through her permanent leaning on the bosom of the Lord Christ, her conquering Head, who will always conquer (Rev 6:2). In Him, the Church sees heaven open, and herself sitting on the right hand of God the Father, through her unity in His Only-Begotten Son. That is the source of her permanent joy: The permanent conquest, and the opening of heaven before her, by her unity with God in Christ Jesus.

He started the feasts here by that celebrating the New Year (Ez 45:18), in the first day of the first month; then the “Passover” (Ez 45:21). In the following chapter, He talked about the Sabbaths, and the permanent feast (the daily offerings, day and night). All these in Christ

Jesus are our permanent feast. He is the beginning of our new life (the New Year); our Passover, who was sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5:7); our true Sabbath, namely the mystery of our rest; and our daily feast, the source of our joy, every day and every night. We have previously dealt with the Jewish feasts, as a symbol of the Christian feast, in our interpretation of the book of Numbers.

PROCLAIM YOUR LAW IN ME

I witness to Your law within me, Your temple: Holiness, Justice and joy!
What is Your law, O You Holy One, But holiness?!
In You My body - the new land - is sanctified!
And in You my soul - the new heaven - is sanctified!
By You, my talents - the new Levites - are sanctified!
And by You, my mind - the new prince - is sanctified!
You are the One who sanctifies the soul, the body, and the Spirit!

You are the Truth with no vanity!
You are the justice without oppression!
Grant me the law of Truth and justice inside me!
Uproot from me every vanity and oppression!

Your dwelling in my depths uproots grief;
Your presence is a joyful kingdom!
Your presence transforms my life into nonstop praise!
Into a permanent feast!

CHAPTER 46

NEW STATUTES

Having presented for the new temple and the new city, their sound foundation; the holiness; their statute, the justice, and their features, the permanent joy, He presents here some other statutes:

- 1- Way of entering into the temple** **1-15.**
- 2- Gifts of the Prince or the King** **16-18.**
- 3- Places for cooking and baking** **19-24.**

1- WAY OF ENTERING INTO THE TEMPLE

In this section, He presented the way, by which the king and the people enter into the temple and get out of it; the burnt offerings and the sacrifices of the king and the people on the Sabbaths and the feasts; as well as the daily burnt offerings. It is to be noticed, that what are mentioned here, were not literally realized after the return of the people from the Babylonian captivity, and the setting of the temple with its worship anew, but they committed themselves to the Mosaic statutes. It is as though, what are mentioned here, are not to be understood literally, but refer to a symbolic meaning in the Messianic era.

The most important of those statutes are:

a- The gateway of the inner court that faces toward the east shall be shut during the six working days, but on the Sabbath and on the day of every new moon it shall be opened. Through that gateway, the king will enter, and through it he will also get out. The people will not use this gateway to enter or to get out; it is only for the king. We said that that gateway refers to the holy womb of the Virgin, through which the King of Kings entered, incarnated, and through it He came out.

If the Lord entered once into humanity and became Man, He still enters into our life, shining as a sun, through the eastern gateway; comes to us to make all our days Sabbaths (rest) and feasts. He shines with His light in us, so that darkness would never have a place in us, but we will always be enlightened, rejoicing for His permanent dwelling in us; as confirmed by the Lord Himself to His disciples before His ascension: “*I am with you always even to the end of the age*” (Mat 28:20).

The people enter through the northern and southern gateways.

Whoever enters from the north, shall walk toward the south, to worship, then he will not go back to the same gateway through which he entered, but will get out through the southern gateway. Also, whoever enters from the south, will walk toward the north, to worship, then he will not go back to the same gateway through which he entered, but will get out through the northern gateway. Some see that this ordinance meant to keep peace in the temple, and to avoid confusion, particularly in the days of feasts, when a huge number of people come to worship. But I think that this ordinance presents to us a portrait of the life of a Christian, who, once he enters into the temple to worship God, would never fallback! It is a portrait of walking straight along the path he gained through the new Church life, with no deviation from the walk of Christian faith.

b- The eastern gateway to the inner court is opened on the Sabbath, all the day until the evening. It is as though God enters into our inner life, to shine in our depths, as long as it is day; enters into us to make our hearts in a state of permanent rest (Sabbath). **Origen** says about celebrating the Sabbath: [What is this celebration of the Sabbath, but what the apostle said: “*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God*” (Heb 4:9); namely to keep the statute of the Sabbath. Let the people of God, forsake the Jewish understanding of the Sabbath; and let us see what we should do as Christians on the Sabbath day. We should refrain from any world activity or temporal work... We should be completely dedicated to spiritual practices: Going to Church, listening to divine readings, and sermons, contemplating on the heavenliness, on the coming life and the coming judgment; and caring, not for the present seen things, but for the unseen future things. This is the Christian way of keeping the Sabbath¹.] He also says: [Let us deeply fetch for the true Sabbath. It means working on it in heaven; for we do not believe that the words of the book of Genesis: “*God rested on the seventh day (the Sabbath) from all His work which He had done*” (Gen 2:2) have been literally realized on the seventh day, and is not even realized today. God is working all the time. There is no Sabbath in which God do not work. There is no day, in which He does not make His sun shine on the evil and on the good; or does not send His rain on the just and on the unjust (Mat 5:45). He makes grass to grow on the mountains (Ps 147:8). “He

¹ In Num. Homily 23:3.

bruises, but He binds up” (Job 5:18). In this world, there is no Sabbath in which God takes rest from ordaining the world or caring for the destinies of mankind¹.]

In our study of the book of Exodus, we saw that the Lord Christ is the true Sabbath. In Him God the Father finds rest, as He sees us in Him justified and sanctified. In Him we also find rest, as, by Him we enter into the bosom of God the Father, the place of our rest. He is the Sabbath of God the Father, and the Sabbath of the believers; the source of the true rest!

c- The gate is also opened on the first day of the month (Ez 46:1); and remains open the whole day. By that He probably means ‘The day of the new moon,’ that was sacred for the Jews, like the Sabbaths, and feast (1 Chro 23:13; 2:4; Ezra 3:5; Col 2:16). In it they used to blow the trumpet (Ps 81:3), celebrate it in their houses, and worship before God (Is 66:23).

Origen comments on this celebration saying: [The celebration of the day of the new moon means the approach of the new moon to the sun and its union with it... when it unites closely with the “Sun of Righteousness,” which is Christ (Mal 4:2). If the new moon symbolizes His Church filled with light, that closely joins, and unites with Him; according to the words of the apostle: “*He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him*” (1 Cor 6:17). It celebrates the new moon; as it becomes new, by forsaking the old man, and putting on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4:24). By that we become worthy of celebrating the day of renewal, that of the new moon².]

d- **The permanent feast:** He says: “*You shall daily make a burnt offering to the Lord of a lamb of the first year without blemish. You shall prepare it every morning. And you shall prepare a grain offering with it every morning...; a perpetual ordinance to be made regularly to the Lord*”(Ez 46:13, 14).

Origen says: [The first feast of the Lord is the permanent feast. It is requested to prepare offerings every day and night, continuously and consistently. In the statute of feasts (in the book of Numbers), the Lord

¹ In Num. Homily 23:3.

² In Num. Homily 23:5.

did not start by the feast of Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, that of the holy bread, or any other feast mentioned. But He stated that the first feast is that of the permanent sacrifice. He requests from him, who seeks perfection and holiness, to have no days that are feasts of the Lord, and others that are not. The righteous always celebrates a permanent feast¹.]

Although **Origen** talks by his well-known church spirit, he who undoubtedly rejoiced for all the Church feasts along the whole year, yet he finds in every day he lives with God, a feast. The feasts of the Christian are consistent; as he enters into the heavenly joy, and consistently tastes the pledge of the eternal kingdom.

2- GIFTS OF THE PRINCE OR THE KING

God intended to preserve the rights of the king and his household, and also that of the people. He fixed the portion of each of them in the previous chapter. But, if the king wished to give a gift to someone, out of his inheritance, God discerned between two cases: if the receiver of the gift is a king's son, the gift consistently stays as his inheritance for him and his children; as that keeps the land within the possession of the royal family. But if the gift is given to one of the people, it shall be his until the year of liberty, after which it shall return to the king. By that the inheritance of the royal family would not go to the people and vice versa. As the king is not allowed to extort any of the people's inherited properties.

In this, there is probably a symbolic portrait of the inheritance in the New Testament, as there is a difference between the son and the slave: the son inherits and possesses forever; while the slave enjoys only temporary blessings. That is why, if we desire to be heirs to God, together with the Lord Christ - the Only-Begotten Son - there is no chance for eternal inheritance, except through the enjoyment of the new birth, the gain of the spirit of adoption to God.

3- PLACES FOR COOKING AND BAKING

The Lord designated places for the priests to cook in their chambers in the inner court, as well as other places in the extreme western ends of the outer court, at the 4 corners. And he also designated places for baking.

¹ In Num. Homily 23:3.

There is great difference between him who enters into the inner court, and who remains in the outer court. None will be left hungry, as long as he entered into fellowship with the Lord Christ; everyone is given a portion. Yet, it is fitting for us to enter consistently and permanently into the inner court, in order to have a fellowship of inner life with Him, and a fulfillment of His sanctities.

YOU ARE MY REST AND MY PERMANENT FEAST

Amazing are Your statutes that You set for my heart, Your temple!
You allow those who enter it, to walk only straightforward!
You are the Truth that accepts no deviation!

You presented to me the statute of Your feasts, the weekly and the yearly;

The Sabbaths of rest, and the feasts of joy.

You are my Sabbaths. You are my rest, O Savior!

You are my joy and permanent feast, O Grantor of resurrection!

You are my consistent praise!

You designated for the king his rights and commitments;

And so also for the people!

No one of them is allowed to take what belongs to the others!

Keep my mind, by Your Holy Spirit, to reign with justice!

And not to corrupt my life!

Caring for Your priests, You designated places for cooking and baking.

You are amazing, O You the heavenly Bread!

You seek the fulfillment of everyone!

CHAPTER 47

THE HOLY WATER AND THE HOLY LAND

After mentioning some of the statutes concerning the new temple, he talked about:

1- The holy waters 1-12.

2- The holy land 13-23.

1- THE HOLY WATERS

In the minds of the prophets of the Old Testament, the era of the Messiah is the golden era, for which the world has long awaited. They described it as an era rich in abundant waters. We have already dealt with this issue¹. The prophet Zechariah sees in this water the source of purity of the people (Zech 13:1); the prophet Joel sees in it the secret of its sanctification (Joel 3:18); the prophet Isaiah, sees in it the secret of the transformation of the wilderness into flowering pasture (Is 44:3). As to the prophet Ezekiel, he believes that the Lord has cleansed humanity, and purified it from its abominations; saying: *“I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil”* (Ez 16:9). He ends his talk about the new temple, by describing the holy waters that flows from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar (Ez 47:1-12). In this talk we notice the following:

a- The prophet Ezekiel saw the water flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east: *“For the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar”* (Ez 47:1). What is this temple facing east, but the Church of the New Testament, that faces toward the Lord Christ - her East; and embraces the holy altar, on which the sacrifice of the New Testament is offered. The holy water that flows from under its threshold, is the ‘Holy Baptism,’ without which no one can enter into fellowship in the Church of Christ. This water draws its power through the sacrifice; according to the words of the apostle John: *“There are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one”* (1 John 5:8). This is the Christian Baptism, which is the action of the Holy Spirit that works in it through the blood of the Lord

¹ راجع كتابنا : الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، الباب الأول.

Christ.

This water purifies the world; and as **St. Jerome** says: [As the world falls into sin, nothing can purify it once again, except that fountain of water¹.]

b- The prophet Ezekiel saw a man who measured 1000 cubits, then brought him through the water; measured another 1000 cubits, then a third; At the fourth, *“It was a river that I could not cross, for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me: ‘Son of Adam, have you seen this?.’ Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river”*(Ez 47:5-6). What is this scene, but bringing the prophet Ezekiel to the sacrament of Baptism?! We know that the figure 1000 refers to the heavenly life; as one day for the Lord is like a 1000 years. It is as though the prophet Ezekiel has entered into the heavenly life through Baptism. Repeating the 1000 four times, is because the work of Baptism embraces the inhabitants of the world, peoples and nations, who come from everywhere (East, west, north, and south). For the believers everywhere to get a heavenly Baptism. There the prophet Ezekiel contemplated on the sacrament of Baptism to find it surpassing any human consideration. He saw it as a river that could not be crossed; and had to return to the bank to contemplate on God’s work with people, through the holy waters.

c- Addressing the prophet by the phrase: *“Son of Adam, have you seen this?”* reminds us of God’s call to Adam, saying: *“Where are you?”* If Adam has lost the splendor of his nature and glories in Paradise, now he is gaining what is lost. That is the cause of this exclamation question!

d- Returning to the bank, there, along its banks the prophet saw: *“very many trees on one side and the other”* (Ez 47:7). It is a symbolic portrait of the believers, *“planted by the rivers of water, that bring forth their fruits in its season; whose leaves shall not wither, and whatever they do shall prosper”* (Ps 1:3). These are the believers, on whom the Holy Spirit descended, to turn them into exceedingly many trees in the paradise of God.

e- He also saw: *“a very great multitude of fish, because these*

¹ Epist. 69:6.

waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes” (Ez 47:9). He saw “fish of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea; exceedingly many” (Ez 47:10). And as the trees refer to the believers, likening the Lord Christ, the ‘Tree of Life;’ so also the fish, they refer to the believers, likening the Lord Christ, the ‘Fish (Ichnus);’ they live in the water of Baptism. **Origen** says: [Christ allegorically, is called ‘the Fish¹.’] And **Tertullian** says: [We are the small fish; according to our fish Jesus Christ, we were born in the water; and shall never be safe, except by staying always there².]

f- He speaks about the sanctification of the water, saying: “Because their water flows from the sanctuary” (Ez 47:12).

2- THE HOLY LAND

After talking about the holy temple and the holy city, He started to designate the holy land that He promised His people, and to distribute it among them. Here we notice:

a- He says: “I lifted My hand in an oath to give it to your fathers, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance” (Ez 47:14). As though He is confirming to them that He will not break the oath that He gave to their fathers (by lifting His hands). He stays honest despite the dishonesty of man.

b- The Lord Himself fixes the location of the whole land on all directions. He cares for His children, for the sake of their comfort.

c- The Lord gave two portions to the tribe of Joseph (Ez 47:13), in order to divide the land into 12 portions - as the tribe of Levi has no portion of its own in the land, the Lord Himself is his portion. The division is to be by lot, to avoid any chance for personal factors to interfere with the fairness of allotting a portion to each tribe (Ez 47:22).

d- He gave the strangers who sojourn among them, the right to have an inheritance among the tribes of Israel (Ez 47:22, 23); a reference to the entrance of the Gentiles into the eternal inheritance, through the preaching of the gospel; All will be one in Christ without distinction (Rom 10:12).

HOW GREAT IS BAPTISM!

¹ On Matt., 5.

² عن المعمودية: راجع للمؤلف الكنيسة بيت الله، 1979، ص 311-314.

In Your water, Your prophet Zechariah saw purification;
Joel saw sanctification;
Isaiah saw fruition; as my wilderness would be transformed into a
Paradise of Yours;
And Ezekiel saw cleansing and purification from our abominations, and
a renewal of our nature!
How great is Baptism!
It is the cleansing, the sanctification, the fruition, and the enlightenment.
On its banks are holy trees; a divine Paradise.
In it, there is a great multitude of fish!
Grant me to live in the water of Your Baptism, to live and grow all the
time!
Do not deprive me of the portion You prepared for me; in the new land.
Your Baptism will bring me into the inheritance of Your glory; O You,
the amazing in greatness.

CHAPTER 48

DIVISION OF THE HOLY LAND

The vision comes to its end by the division of the holy land, fixing the portions of the tribes, setting a plan for the holy city and its gates, and giving the new name:

1- Division of the holy land 1-29.

2- Plan of the holy city 30-35.

1- DIVISION OF THE HOLY LAND

In short, the vision carried out the division in the following way:

a- Seven tribes were chosen to be on the north side of the temple (Ez 48:1-7); and five tribes to be on its south side (Ez 48:23-29). The temple, therefore, came to represent the pulsating heart for all the tribes; the source of life and sanctification of its inhabitants.

b- Before captivity, the people were divided into two kingdoms: One embracing ten tribes, that was captivated by Assyria; and the other, embracing two tribes, that was captivated by Babylon. Now, however, under the rich grace of God, in the new temple, there is only one, undivided kingdom of Christ..

c- Setting apart the land for the temple and the priests (Ez 48:8-11); as where the temple is, there would be the priests to minister to it; and to them the offerings would be presented. Again, He confirms the rewarding of the sons of Zadok, who “*are sanctified, who have kept His charge, who did not go astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray*” (Ez 48:11); that is why they were alone worthy of offering the sacrifices on the altar, and of approaching those sanctuaries.

d- The division here, is completely different from that in the days of Joshua the son of Nun. Some scholars believe that this division is not to be interpreted literally, but in a symbolic sense.

In dividing the land of Canaan in the days of Joshua the son of Nun, the tribe of Dan got its portion after all the other tribes got theirs (Jos 19:40); whereas here, they got their portion before anyone (Ez 48:2). It is as though the divine proclamation intends to confirm to us, that in the day of the Lord, we shall see strange things that we do not

expect... the first becoming the last, and the last becoming the first.

Origen says that here we find great mighty men appearing like little children in the day of the Lord; and the other way round. He also says that we shall see some men, apparently great in faith, who appear weak, and the other way round. The day of the Lord will reveal amazing things that we do not expect.

e- Every tribe takes from God a portion that suits it, and keeps it from need; to say together with the Psalmist: *“He will chose our inheritance for us; The excellence of Jacob whom He loves”* (Ps 47:4). It is to be noticed that the border for each tribe represents the border for the other; a sign of unity and fellowship through the holy mutual love.

f- The land designated for ministry, could not be sold nor exchanged; and no first fruit is offered on it, as it represents in itself a first fruit to the Lord, dedicated to Him (Ez 48:14).

g- The holy city is square in shape, with equal dimensions on every side; the way the cities of the Levites were before. And that, according to some scholars cannot be applied literally, yet it represents the city of the Living God.

The inhabitants of the city, were before, mostly of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; as the city was located within their territories. In the new city, however, there are people from all the tribes of Israel (Ez 48:19), representing the kingdom of God on earth for all humanity.

h- To the king, a special portion is given, that suits his responsibilities (Ez 48:1); so that he would not covet the portions of the people.

2- THE HOLY CITY

It is to be noticed that it is similar to the new city, seen by St. John the beloved, that we previously dealt with in our interpretation of the book of Revelation (Chapter 21); being square in shape; with 12 gates: three on each side; a reference to the fact that entrance to the kingdom of God is through the Holy Trinity; and a sign that its gates will be open on the east, west, north and south, to embrace believers from every tongue and nation. On the gates the names of the tribes are inscribed, being a symbol of the (catholic) Church that embraces all the tribes of humanity.

It is to be noticed that the city is not called “Jerusalem,” nor “Canaan;” but is given another name, “*Jehovah Shamah;*” namely, “*The Lord is there.*” St. John the beloved heard a voice from heaven, saying: “*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God*” (Rev 21:3). It is as though the end of the whole Book, is the entry with God in a permanent dwelling; in a fellowship and unity, in which we come to be with and in Him; and He dwells in us forever.

The book started with a heavenly vision of a fearful fiery divine chariot, before which Ezekiel himself fell on his face; There, the divine judgment of chastening the people, and the departure of the glory of God from the temple and the city, were proclaimed. Then the book ends with the opening of the gates of heaven before humanity from the east and the west; of all nations, peoples, and tongues, to enjoy the fellowship of the divine glory!

YOU ARE MY PORTION! YOU ARE MY GLORY!

You opened the gates of heaven before Your prophet Ezekiel;
He got terrified, and fell on his face before Your divine chariot!
You lifted him up and supported him, to proclaim Your mysteries!
When he heard the chastisements of the people, he was troubled!
When he saw how Your glory departed from Your temple and city, he
was grieved!
Now, You are showing him the plan of Your salvation;
An open heaven; and people of every tongue, eternally enjoying the
fellowship of Your glory!

Lift me up to Your heavens;
I long to behold the Higher city of Jerusalem;
To encounter with You face to face;
To fall in Your bosom forever!
You are my portion!
You are my joy and the pleasure of my heart!
You are my crown and glory!
When shall I behold You, and stay with You, O the pleasure of my
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