

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

*The Book
of*
ISAIAH

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2002
Initial edition

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THE PROPHETS

The books of the Holy Scripture from Isaiah to Malachi are called “Prophetic Books.” That does not mean that prophecy began by Isaiah. It has been there since the prophet Moses came as the first leader of the people of Israel. Still certain scholars believe that prophecy goes back to the dawn of human life, considering Adam himself a prophet.

On the other hand, the prophetic books, do not stop at presenting prophecies, but they embrace history, laws, wisdom, and even poetry, etc.

THE PROPHETS

The term ‘*Prophet*’ is not to be understood as a certain person revealing future events, as much as revealing God’s mind and will concerning man, especially his eternal salvation, to be realized through the Lord Christ. God introduced the prophets as His own men to testify to Him, strongly and courageously. However His Holy Spirit supported them, at a time when the religious and civil leaderships, clergy and kings alike, have gone astray. Many priests became preoccupied by love of authority, dignity, and life of luxury; that led them to do their best to gain the favor of kings and rulers, at the expense of their duties toward their people’s souls. The killing letter, as a way to cover up their inner corruption, also preoccupied them. Kings and rulers, on the other hand, became preoccupied with vainglory, depending on human planning, disregarding faith in God and leaning on Him. That is why prophets appeared on the stage to confront the corruption of both leaderships and people alike, something that aroused the animosity of all of them.

The following line came clear in all the writings of the prophets:

1. **Repentance or return to God** with the heart, and not with superficial practices, is the right way to deal with inner and outer: social, political, and spiritual problems.
2. **Exposing the wrongdoings**, especially those of the religious and civil leaderships, not for the sake of defaming them, but rather to seek the true spiritual cure.
3. **Prophecy of near future local events**, in order to confirm God’s chastisement for corruption and lack of trust in Him; or to confirm His compassion as a result of their repentance, as for example the captivity of the people of Israel and their return from it.
4. **Prophecy of far future events**, the center of which is the coming of the Savior Messiah, who set up a spiritual kingdom that would embrace nations and people.
5. **God alone is the Savior**; and salvation is the only subject that should preoccupy the thoughts of all.

Prophecies of prophets, numerous as they are, liken a guitar, on the cords of which, the Holy Spirit of God plays faultlessly, to offer a symphony of God's love, through the redemptive work of Christ.

MAJOR AND MINOR PROPHETS

Scholars used to differentiate between Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel), and minor ones (the rest of the prophets). This distinction is not based on the differentiation of the prophets themselves, but rather on the relative sizes of their books. Certain scholars liken the Minor Prophets to small atomic bombs that embody, nevertheless, huge energies¹.

¹ *J. Vernon McGee: Isaiah, 1982, p. 7.*

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Isaiah was called “*The prophetical Evangelist*,” and his book “*The Gospel of Isaiah*,” or the “*Fifth Gospel*.” Whoever reads it would see it as one of the New Testament books, and its author as an eyewitness to the life of Lord Christ and His redemptive work, especially the “cross;” he would see a lively portrait of redemption, and its deep divine mysteries.

St. Jerome says, [In the book of Isaiah, I see an evangelist narrating the life of Jesus Christ; besides being a prophet who speaks of things to come¹.]

H. A. Ironside says that more than any other prophetical book, the book of Isaiah includes the most perfect Messianic prophecies in the Old Testaments; definitely testifying to the passions of Lord Christ, and to all the glories that followed them².

Fathers of the Church, in their debates with unbelievers, depended on it, because of the numerous and clear prophecies it included, concerning the Person of the Lord Christ, His redemptive work, His Church, His Holy Spirit etc.³

Shortly after **St. Augustine** converted to the Christian faith, the elderly Bishop **St. Ambrose** asked him what he was reading, to which he answered, “Isaiah⁴.”

ISAIAH

The name “Isaiah” was common among the Jews; we find, at least seven persons in the Holy Bible who carry this name.

“Isaiah” is the same as “Jeshaiah,” mentioned in Ezra 8:7; Neh. 11: 7; 1 Chro. 3:21; it means “God’s salvation,” or “God saves.” His name came to reveal his mission; as his book carries, in its wholeness, a clear and prominent trend, that concerns the amazing salvation of God, realized by the coming of the Victim Messiah, the Founder of the Kingdom, and the Grantor of glory.

He was called by the name “*Isaiah, the son of Amoz*” (Is. 1: 1), to designate him from the other persons carrying the same name. Many scholars believe that the name “Amoz” here is not

¹ أنطون يعقوب: تفسير نبوات إشعيا، 1949، ص 8.

² H. A. Ironside: *Expository notes on the Prophet Isaiah*, 1985, p.3.

³ Cf. *Epistle of Barnabas*; *St. Justin: Apology 1*; *Dial. with Trypho*.

⁴ Hurry Bultema: *Commentary on Isaiah*, Michigan, 1981, p. 19.

that of the prophet “Amos¹.” According to the Jewish tradition, he was the brother of “Amsea” the king of Judah; and also a prophet.

He had been in Jerusalem, and worked in it (Is. 7: 3; 22: 1, 15; 37: 2; 38: 5; 39: 3). Unlike Jeremiah, he was married, and got children. Jeremiah has denied marriage, to spare his family the bitter circumstances, that were to come to the people, and the corruption that became like a contagious plague. Isaiah, on the other hand, got married, and his wife was called the “*prophetess*” (Is. 8: 3); not that she practiced prophecy, but because she shared with her husband his spiritual strife and his feelings, becoming for him, the best companion and support of his mission. They got, at least, two sons, who carried two symbolic names; the older was called “Shear-Jashub,” meaning “the remnants will return” (Is. 7: 3); and the younger was called “Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz,” meaning: “hasten to loot” (Is. 8: 3). The two names reflected Isaiah’s prophecies, as we shall see.

Isaiah had been proud of his family, sanctified in God, as well as of his spiritual disciples, whom he counted as his sons and family, saying, “*Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel*” (Is. 8: 18)

The apostle Paul used that phrase to symbolize for our Lord Jesus Christ who leads His disciples to glory. (Hebrews 2: 13)

RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL, AND ETHICAL CIRCUMSTANCES AT THE TIME OF ISAIAH

1. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem - as a member of the royal household - in an aristocratic atmosphere, sitting with kings making friendship with them and offering them the good counsel. He had been a prophet in the kingdom of Judah, and he, most probably occupied an important position in the royal court, that was obvious in his awareness of the political, religious, and social currents at that time. He exposed the party, that was encouraging the alliance with Egypt (Is. 29: 15; 30: 1); and managed to remove Shebna from his prominent position (Is. 22: 15).

He began his prophetic work in the year king Uzziah of Judah died (740 or 739 B.C.). But that does not mean, that he started it after the death of the king, but most probably just before that. He kept on working his mission until the death of king Hezekiah (697 or 696 B.C.); and according to Jewish tradition, during the reign of king Manasseh, son of Hezekiah. Thus, his prophetic work covered more than 50, or may be 60 years.

His life on earth ended by being sawed by a wooden saw, by the order of king Manasseh, according to Jewish tradition, and writings of certain Fathers of the Church². This might be what the apostle Paul meant, when he spoke of those who were “sawn in two.” (Hebrews 11: 37)

¹ *Ibid*, p. 1.

² *Origen: Commentary on Is. 3:6-12; St. Justin: Dial. with Trypho.*

2. Isaiah used to see in the streets of Jerusalem, the capital, the carriages of the king, his household, and rich haughty elite, together with their spoiled wives who lived in great luxury and indulgence, proudly and arrogantly riding their chariots. He watched the daily luxuriant banquets, incessantly held in the royal palace, attended by the military, religious, and civil leaderships; all of them drinking wine profusely, to turn these banquets into scornful and disgraceful sittings. At the same time, he used to see how these rich people used to enter the temple, to offer sacrifices and offerings without count, seeking through them acknowledgment and respect from the greedy religious leaders; then to go back to practice pagan transgressions next to the temple! That was the situation in the city that was referred to God, and in which His Holy temple was erected; while the screams of widows, orphans, poor, and afflicted, were sounding in the ears of the prophet, and rather rising to the throne of God.

The kingdom of Judah was corrupted, both the leadership and the people *“The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores. They have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.”* (Is. 1: 5, 6)

Some scholars believe that what became of Judah, would definitely infect the rest of the world, in a way or another, as for example:

a. Gathering into a mass, for the sake of enjoying human authority, not depending on that of God (Is. 8: 9-13).

b. Spiritual ignorance, while the reasonless nature instinctually submits to its Creator, man is ignorant of his Creator, who cares for his salvation and eternity (Is. 1: 2-4).

c. Corruption of leadership with childish and immature deeds, together with interference of woman race with deviated authority, even among some of the religious circles (Is. 3: 12); and spreading of the spirit of hypocrisy without objectivity of truth itself.

d. Selfishness and love of money, with all of what to follow, of practicing unfairness and love of bribes (Is. 1: 23).

e. Licentiousness of faith; accepting religion, while denying the redemptive work of God, commitment to truth, or believing in eternal judgment.

POLITICAL SITUATION¹

Isaiah lived at a time when the world was overwhelmed by great powers; starting by the struggle between Egypt and Assyria to dominate it; then, during the last days of Isaiah, between Assyria and Babylon. The slogan of these nations has been “Power is the truth.”

As to how that struggle affected Israel (the Northern Kingdom), and Judah, that we can

¹ H. Bultema, p. 12-15; *The New Century Bible Commentary: R.E. Clements, Isaiah 1-39, 1988, p. 9-11.*

know by reading (2 Kings 15-17):

- ❖ Menahem king of Israel gave silver to Pul, king of Assyria to let him reign over his kingdom, Israel. (2 Kings 15:19, 20)
- ❖ In the last days of Azariah, King of Judah, when Isaiah received his mission, Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, conquered Pekah, king of Israel (2 Kings 15: 29). The later destroyed the army of Ahaz, king of Judah, killed 120,000, and took 200,000 captives. He had an alliance with Rezin, king of Syria, against Judah for political reasons. They wished for Judah to join them, with a support from the Pharaoh of Egypt, to confront Assyria; yet Judah rejected that offer, preferring to join Assyria against them.

I will not go into details of the political events; except to say that Hosea killed Pekah then submitted to pay tribute money to Assyria (2 kings 17: 3). But, as Shalmaneser of Syria did not trust him, he put him in prison, besieged Samaria for three years and carried Israel away to captivity (2 kings 17: 4-6), in the year 722 B.C.

If Samaria, capital of the ten tribes, selfishly made a pact with Aram Syria against Judah; Yet, Judah in its turn, committed a political miscalculation: Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son," begging him to save him from the hands of the kings of Syria and Israel (2 Kings 16:7), presenting him with the treasures of the temple and palace. Tiglath-Pileser did support him, but later despised him and withdrew his assistance (2 Chronicles. 28: 20, 21). After that, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came with a great army, and entered Judah, in the days of Hezekiah, son of Ahaz. God allowed the destruction of many cities, but kept Jerusalem for some time.

Isaiah lived in that atmosphere with a heart burnt with love towards his people, and a bitter soul, because of the dissension between Ephraim (Israel) and Judah, that went so far, to the extent that each of them made a pact with foreign nations against the other. On the other hand, Isaiah watched, how Judah, although seeing the destruction that happened to Samaria, not more than 35 to 49 miles away from Jerusalem (Is. 22: 1), yet, kept on in its evil way.

Isaiah, as a patriotic man, was preoccupied with Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, the city of God, and the center of his dreams and hopes. He often spoke of it, yet openly used to reveal its defilement and licentiousness, proclaiming his struggle, not only for the sake of its protection politically, but also for its sanctification on behalf of the Holy God.

Isaiah, as a wise man of politics, and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, comprehended the circumstances that were prevailing at his time. He prophesied about the fall of Damascus and Samaria, and the extension of the authority of Assyria over the Middle East (Is. 7). His prophetic insight went forward to a faraway future, to see the danger of Babylon on Judah (Is. 39); and in the spirit of hope, he proclaimed the return of all the people - all tribes - from the Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah saw in Assyria (and later in Babylon), means of divine chastisement against Israel and Judah. The people of Judah were unable to imagine the possibility of an Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem; but the prophet made it clear that nations, and history as a whole, are all in the hand of God, to be used for the sake of repentance of His people, and their return to Him. There is no solution for their political problems, other than repentance.

Isaiah was strongly loyal to the word of truth, backed by the authority of the Holy Spirit. He courageously said to Ahaz, the king: *“Is it a small thing for you to weary men; but will you weary my God also?”* (Is. 7: 13)

He rebuked the people as evildoers (Is. 1: 4); and the elite as *“rulers of Sodom”* (Is. 1: 10); and mocked the enemies (Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel), at a time, when all of Jerusalem was terrified of them; regarding them as *“two stubs of smoking firebrands.”* (Is. 7: 4) Yet, at the same time, *“His heart cries out for Moab”* (Is. 15: 5), and *“bitterly weeps”* for the fall of Babylon (Is. 22: 4).

FEATURES OF THE PERSON OF ISAIAH

1. From early times, Isaiah has been called the “Great Prophet,” because of his works and writings¹. He carried within his personality the courage of Daniel, the gentleness of Jeremiah, the pains of Hosea, and the fury of Amos. Yet, he surpassed them all, by his unique literary capability of holy stinging criticism, while widely opening the gates of hope, not only for his people, but also for humanity as a whole.

2. God talks to His prophet Isaiah, through the three well-known divine ways of proclamation²:

a. Through **glorified revelations** (Is. 6); he was called a *“Seer”* (30: 10). He saw the coming Lord Christ, His spiritual glory filling the whole world; the heavens shaken to praise His holiness and glory. That revelation prevailed over his life, his thoughts, and his words: holiness with glory, are the obvious trend throughout the whole book not dictated, to human hand, but through the redemptive work of Christ. That trend stamped the book with the spirit of hope, despite confirming God’s hate for sin, and the fall of nations under severe chastisement because of it.

b. **The work of the Spirit** in Isaiah’s life, that held him, as though *“with a strong hand”* (Is. 8: 11), and inflamed his life; the word of God became for him, as fire putting his bones aflame.

c. Proclamation through a **fatherly sort of talk**: The Almighty Lord of hosts spoke to him

¹ H. Bultema: p.3.

² Ibid, p. 10-11.

whispering as to a friend (Is. 8: 11; 20: 2; 22: 14). This is considered the most exalted way of divine proclamation, presenting the spirit of divine friendship.

And as the prophet received the prophecy through these three ways, he, in his turn, presented it through three ways:

- ❖ Through **open-air public preaching**, provoking the repentance of all.
- ❖ Through **allegoric actions**: In Isaiah (20: 2, 3), it is mentioned that he became “*a sign and wonder*,” walking naked and barefooted for three years, to confirm to Judah, their future captivity under the yoke of Assyria.
- ❖ Through **writing** a clear proclamation in a public place, as the temple, for the sake of warning.

3. Isaiah enjoyed the mystery of God, at a time when formalities of worship overwhelmed the life of people and leaders; all characterized by hypocrisy and corruption of inner life. As priests and kings failed to realize their mission to put Israel and Judah on the right track, God continued to serve His people through prophets. Isaiah came to proclaim that there is no other way to reform, victory or glory, other than through sanctified life; and that the Holy God is compassionate to sinners, and feels their weaknesses, and yearns for their salvation.

Isaiah presented prophesies concerning future events; yet his primary aim was proclaiming God’s plans, along all time: past, present, and future, working through all nations, even those rejecting Him. It is as though this book answers the following questions³:

- ❖ Is God really the Master of history, when the wicked nation were much stronger than His people?
- ❖ Does power give nations the truth?
- ❖ What is God’s role in the world?
- ❖ Does God’s judgment or chastisement mean His divine rejection of the people?
- ❖ What is the nature of ‘trusting in,’ or ‘leaning on’ Him?
- ❖ What is the future of the kingdom of David?

4. His book is considered one of the most marvelous prophetic writings, in a beautiful literate style. The whole book is poetic in nature, with the exception of chapters 36 - 39; called by De Costa “a gift of poetry⁴.”

He heard by himself the songs of the heavenly hosts (Is. 6); and saw heaven and earth filled with divine glory. His depth, was shaken to praise the Lord, he poured his soul, using, with the help of the Holy Spirit of God, all his exalted literate abilities, and the richness of his thoughts, to touch every soul that listens to him. He presented numerous kinds of praise that carry

³ *The New International Commentary on the N.T., Book of Isaiah 1-39, John N. Oswalt, 1986, p. 28.*

⁴ *Cf. Bultema, p.4.*

joy, sorrow, tears, commandments, and glory to God! His book came as a prophetic talk, through which he lovingly pours himself in our souls, with a splendid and a sweet style, speaking the language of love and loyalty, with a prophetic spirit, though futuristic in nature, yet living in actuality. He frankly and bravely expressed how he felt towards the civil and religious leaderships, and people, particularly the underprivileged and afflicted; which made his writings both lively and effective.

Isaiah presented the reasonless nature: the mountains, forests, rivers, valleys etc., all partaking of man's life.

H. Bultema quotes the following comments on the language of this book¹:

St. Jerome states that it is impossible for any translation of this book into another language, to fulfill its beauty without depriving of its style.

Van Der Palm states that as the language of ecstasy is completely foreign to him, he will not venture to translate Isaiah's poetry.

Dillman says that Isaiah is a consummated artist in his words.

De Costa says that Isaiah is an angelic and princely one.

5. The book of Isaiah is privileged by its numerous prophecies concerning **the Lord Christ**: His birth from a virgin (7: 14); His Deity (9: 6); His descent from the stem of Jesse (11: 1); "*the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him*" (11: 2); "*will bring justice to the Gentiles*" (42: 1); His humility (42: 2); will bring hope to all (42: 3); His escape to Egypt, and setting there an altar of the New Testament (19); His passion and crucifixion (50: 6; 53: 1-12); opening a highway of joy and gladness for those redeemed by His resurrection (35: 8-10); setting a new era filled with peace, to embrace both the Jews and the Gentiles. He talked profusely of the messianic era, as an inner royal one, that bears unsurpassed blessings.

He also spoke of **the Holy Spirit**, and His exalted gifts in the messianic era (11: 2; 32: 15; 40: 7; 42: 1; 44: 3; 66: 1 etc.).

There is nowhere in the Holy Scripture, where you will find a more amazing dealing with **the Cross**, with its deepest mysteries, than that recorded in the book of Isaiah.

As to **the water of the Holy Spirit**, the water of salvation, proclaimed by the Lord Christ on the great day of the feast: "*Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters*" This was recorded by Isaiah, the great among the prophets, in chapter 55 of his book².

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The book of Isaiah has its special importance; considered by Ben Sirach 48: 24, as the

¹ Cf. Bultema, p. 5-6.

² القس لوقا سيداروس: إشعياء، المقدمة للقمص بيشوي كامل.

“*Comfort of Zion.*” The writers of the New Testaments - most of them Jews - quoted from Isaiah 21 direct texts, beside numerous references¹.

From the start of Christianity, the book of Isaiah is looked upon as an important testimonial to the Person of the Lord Christ (Acts 8: 27 - 39; 1 Peter 2: 22 - 25). The Lord Christ Himself read from that book, referring to His Person (Mark 1: 11).

ISAIAH AND THE COPTIC LITURGIES

As the book of Isaiah concentrated on the redemptive work of the Lord Christ, and revealed His reign, designated by the gift of the Holy Spirit (referred to by water and rain), a chapter of it is usually read in the prayer of the first hour of every day of the Great Lent, in the prayers of the *Blessing of the Water* in Maundy Thursday, the Feast of the Apostles, and the Feast of Epiphany.

THE THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF ISAIAH

Certain scholars believe that the theological program of Isaiah, could be presented under four headings: “God; humanity; world; and salvation²,” and that it could be summarized in the following phrase: “*The Holy God condemns sin, that completely corrupted humanity, and led to the fall of the whole world under judgment. Our Savior bore judgment in His body, to raise us in Him as saints; to be glorified with Him.*”

This book includes amazing correlations such as: Divine glory - human decline; the horrible final judgment - the supreme godly salvation; the infallible and incomprehensible God - the disability of pagan worship; the extensive wisdom of God - the idiocy of idol worship; the richness of godly gifts - the destruction of blessing through sin.

Through these, and other correlations, God proclaims His redemptive love toward man, to raise him, and to grant him “to inherit His holy mountain” (Is. 57: 13), together with wisdom, victory, and glories.

1. God, “The Holy One of Israel³”

Isaiah, often used this title, “*The Holy One of Israel,*” used it only six times in other books, (Jeremiah 50: 29; 51: 5; Ezekiel 39: 7; Psalms 71: 22; 78: 14; 89: 18). Its numerous use, throughout the whole book, indicates its unity: (Isaiah 1: 4; 5: 19, 24; 10: 17, 20; 12: 6; 17: 7; 29: 19, 23; 30: 11, 12, 15; 31: 1; 37: 23; 41: 14, 16, 20; 43: 3, 14, 15; 45: 11; 47: 4; 48: 17; 49: 7 (twice); 45: 5; 55: 5; 60: 9, 14)

Whom does he mean by “*The Holy One of Israel,*” but the Person of the Lord Christ: the

¹ Oswalt, p. 29.

² Oswalt, p. 32.

³ H. Bultema, p. 20.

Creator, the Unifier and Renewer of Israel, through His redemptive work, to protect and glorify them. In every chapter of this book, the Lord Christ is the center of the whole text.

At the start of his prophetic work, Isaiah saw the Lord Christ sitting on the throne of His glory, with the Seraphim praising Him saying, “*Holy, Holy, Holy*” (Is. 6). In his revelation St. John saw the four living creatures, carriers of the divine throne, singing the same song in heaven (Rev. 4: 8).

As was previously stated, Isaiah learned not to separate between the absolute holiness of God, and His eternal glories. Calling Him “*the Holy One of Israel,*” is because He is the Holy One, who sets for Himself a holy people, to partake of His eternal glories. He is Holy in essence, but His Holiness closely touches our relationship with Him.

Confirming the Holiness of God, destroys the prevailing pagan idea at that time, that God is just a ‘superhuman,’ or a ‘great grandfather in heaven.’ God is completely different from His creation; He is alone the Supreme; alone the Holy¹. Yet, He is, at the same time, not isolated from His creation, but is sanctifying it.

As much as the prophet demonstrates the extent of corruption of humanity, even of the people chosen by God, he confirms the honesty of God, the One, the Holy, and His capability, as far as salvation is concerned (Is. 41: 14; 43: 3, 14, 15; 47: 4; 48: 17, etc.), in order to grant them the fellowship of His heavens (35: 8; 48: 2; 60: 14; 62: 12).

As much as he demonstrated the idiocy of idol-worship, and their helplessness, he confirmed that God, the Mighty is the Creator, the Helper, the Leader, and the Judge; who has the time in His hand; and is capable of moving the nations to realize His holy will, as far as His believers are concerned.

2. Humanity and the world

Isaiah’s look toward humanity and the world, reflected on his own personality; in that he believed that man - that amazing creature – is the subject of God’s love; for whose sake He moves everything in order to sanctify him, and whom, by Himself he grants salvation; Yet, at the same time, he sees man, all weak, who destroyed himself by himself, to end up as nothing, incapable of getting salvation outside the range of divine work.

That, we see in the personality of Isaiah himself. He stood before the Lord proclaiming: “*Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*” (Is. 6: 5) But, once he enjoyed a touch on his mouth, of a firebrand, which one of the Seraphim took from the divine altar, he set forth to work with great energy. He enjoyed a strong, yet an attractive personality, which combines a prophetic spirit, with a broad-minded; incessant readiness to work; with sweetness of style and words; courageously rebuking,

¹ Oswalt p.33.

yet leaving the door of hope open; honest to his nationality, yet loving the whole humanity; apprehensive of the actual circumstances prevailing at his time, yet his heart was set on the future, to reach eternity itself.

Thus his personality, together with his interaction with other people, reveals how Isaiah looked to people and mankind. He did not preoccupy himself with titles and high positions, believing that real strength lies in that mystery inner encounter with the Holy One. That is why he was not afraid to address kings, or to speak against nations; talking with orphans, widows, and the afflicted, with affection and compassion. He realized the real value of human soul, away from worldly measures and outer formalities.

3. The sin

Sin, in Isaiah's eye, in whatever form, is a "mutiny" against the Holy One, as is clear from the opening and end of his book¹. This view is obvious all along the book: God works for our sake, sanctifying us to share His traits. Thus every sin is like a revolution against Him.

4. The salvation

If the first chapters (1 to 39) confirm God's hate of sin, and His chastisement of sinners, the following chapters (40 to 66), proclaim God's amazing salvation of sinners from all peoples and nations.

God, the Judge, is Himself the Savior, who reveals the wounds, not to expose, but to heal them with delicacy and compassion. That is why, every time He proclaims His firmness against sin, He soon reveals His redemptive work, to put joyous hope in souls. Isaiah profusely talks of the new life that became ours in Christ (43: 18, 19; 62: 2; 41: 15, 16; 65: 17, etc.).

The Servant of Jehovah (The Servant of the Lord)

One of the problems that faced critics, is the expression "*The Servant of Jehovah*" or "*The Servant of the Lord*," referred to in chapters 40-50 about 20 times: 41: 8, 9; 42: 1, 19; 43: 10; 44: 1, 2, 21, 26; 45: 4; 48: 20; 49: 5, 6; 50: 10; 52: 13; 53: 11; 54: 17. **This problem could be summarized in two points:**

1. Most references presented him as Israel or Jacob.
2. Sometimes he is presented as the dishonest servant, and other times as the chosen one, object of the Father's pleasure; who suffers for the sake of saving human kind.

Who could that "*Servant of Jehovah*" be?

1. At the beginning of the Christian era, there were certain Jews, who interpreted "*the Servant of Jehovah*," as being the Messiah; but some others rejected that, as they did not expect

¹ Oswalt, p. 39.

the Messiah, the son of David, who would establish the conquering kingdom, to suffer; Therefore, they saw in that “Servant,” a symbol of the Jewish nation¹. This last interpretation is not logically acceptable, and does not conform to what came in the book, in which the prophet proclaimed that he suffers, and works for the sake of the world’s salvation (49: 5, 6; 53: 5, 11). Did the Jewish nation do that?

2. Certain critics tried to interpret that person as being a historical figure, or as a legendary idea to present a specific theological concept. C. R. North rejected these two interpretations. As to the first one, he wonders, who could be that historical figure? Is he the prophet himself, or some other?! It is clear that the talk does not refer to a certain historical figure in the Old Testament era. As to the second interpretation, it is unacceptable as well, because the Old Testament never used the legends adopted by peoples of the Near East at that time². ‘North’ believes that what is mentioned concerning “*the Servant of Jehovah*” should be Messianically interpreted; that is, conforming to the Messiah.

3. Some believe that ‘North’ concentrated on the praises of the Servant (42: 1 - 4; 49: 1 - 6; 50: 4.9; 52: 13 - 53:12), where there was no reference to the Servant as being Israel or Jacob, but concentrated only on His redemptive work. Thus accepting the messianic interpretation³.

4. If we go back to the Holy Bible, we find the apostle Philip interpreting that Servant as being Jesus Christ (Acts 8: 30.35). So, how could the Bible present Him, sometimes as the “dishonest,” and some other times as the “chosen,” object of God’s pleasure?

Ironside answers⁴ that Israel, as the Lord’s Servant, unable to save himself, he was in need of that, chosen by Jehovah, the Servant who came to realize the message of salvation. The first Adam received the counsel of the enemy, so came under punishment and in humiliation, for alienating himself from God. That is why, the second Adam came to destroy the enemy, and to establish His own Church (the new Israel), and to proclaim His presence in her (8: 18; 12: 6; 30: 29; 31: 9).

Therefore, the “*Servant of Jehovah*” is spoken of sometimes, as being the first Adam, who had been destroyed by sin; and some other time, as the second Adam, the Son of Man, who destroyed its authority.

St. Augustine believes the “*Servant of Jehovah*” to symbolize the Lord Christ; yet refers sometimes to His Church, the new Israel, the bride united with Him, and the body that enjoyed

¹ C.R. North: *Isaiah 40-55*, 1981, p. 29-30.

² C.R. North: *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: A Historical and Critical Study*, 1956, p. 192-219.

³ Oswald, p. 51.

⁴ Ironside, p. 8.

His salvation¹.

REFERENCE OF THE BOOK TO ISAIAH, AND ITS UNITY

Some of the recent critics try to deny the unity of this book, and its reference, in its wholeness to Isaiah the prophet. Some claim that Isaiah only wrote its first part (chapters 1 to 39); and that someone else, whom they call 'the second Isaiah,' wrote the rest of it. Yet, some others claim that the second Isaiah only wrote the chapters 40 to 55, while a third author wrote the chapters 56 to 66. Those theories tending to divide the book, were initiated through comments by J. R. Doderlein, in the year 1775, and by J. G. Eichhorn in the years 1780 - 1783. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, interpreters looked at the book of Isaiah, as separate books; basing their views on the following arguments:

1. Historical background

Critics could not accept the idea that the Spirit of God, would possibly reveal the future to men of God, for purpose of edifying the congregation; and did not acknowledge what Ben Sirach said of Isaiah, that he spoke of the future (Ben Sirach 48: 24). That is why they claim the author of chapters 40 to 60, must have been a contemporary of the Babylonian empire, and its collapse at the hands of Cyrus (Is. 44: 28; 45: 1). And as we said in the introductions of several of the books of the Old Testament, that the real problem lied mainly in the denial of the prophetic critics of the prophecy, and in their rejection of divine miracles.

2. Ideas' background

Some critics believe that chapters 1 to 39 represent a separate book, that adopts a distinct line of thought—that is the chastisement of the people of God for their sins, particularly those pertaining to their leaning on human arm; and their indulgence in pagan transgressions, like the nations surrounding them. Then, all of a sudden, chapters 40 to 66, adopt a different line of thought, and give another impression, in which the author proclaims a new salvation, in a new covenant, undergone by the Creator, interested in renewing His creation, that became corrupted.

3. Linguistic and literate background

Some critics believe that the linguistic and literate impressions in chapters 1 to 39 are different from those in chapters 40 to 66.

Answering claims of a second and a third book of Isaiah

1. Bultema considers² it as strange, to discover the existence of a second Isaiah, during a

¹ Cf. Augustine: *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, trans. By M.S. Muldowney: *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 38 (N.Y. 1959), p. 80-81.

² Bultema, p. 363.

late period, by some theologians, when that was never mentioned by any of the Jewish scholars, and the early Fathers of the Church, even by those who led the Protestant movement. How had that second Isaiah been hidden all along these years?

2. The Septuagint version of the Holy Scripture, in the third century B.C., referred the whole book to the prophet Isaiah, with no division.

3. The Jewish historian Josephus offers us an outsider testimonial of the authenticity of that book (Is. 40 to 66), and its reference to Isaiah: that it was written during a time far earlier than that of Cyrus, saying that Cyrus himself, when he read what was written in the book of Isaiah, was astonished, and was strongly motivated to realize what was written of him¹. It is obvious here, that he knew of only one Isaiah.

If that author had not been known at the time of Cyrus, that would mean, either that what Josephus wrote of Cyrus was valueless, or that Cyrus had been an idiot, deceived by the Jews.

4. Joshua, son of Sirach referred the whole book to the prophet Isaiah. The books of the New Testament testified to that, by quoting certain of its phrases, referring them to Isaiah.

5. Concerning the ideas' difference between the successive divisions of this book, Oswalt believes that trying to divide the book in recent times is responsible of creating that notion of denial of the ideas' unity of the book in its wholeness². He presented us with the following example of its ideas' unity:

The whole book responds to two questions:

What is the nature of God's people? and,

What is their destiny?

- ❖ In Isaiah 1 to 6: The prophet presents the problem. Sinners are called, and the solution lies in beholding God.
- ❖ In Isaiah 7 to 39: He reveals the wisdom of dependence on God, not leaning on neighboring nations. Instead of leaning on them in weakness, they should have recognized their mission, namely, to be light to the nations. The children of Judah started to depend on God, but failed to keep on doing that.
- ❖ In Isaiah 40 to 48: He responds to the question: What is the solution of Judah's failure to keep depending on God. He provoked them to do that, even through chastisement and captivity. God allows captivity, yet He still proclaims, "I am here!" His glory fills heaven and earth, according to the vision of Isaiah (Is. 6).
- ❖ In Isaiah 49 to 55: He responds to the question: Is it possible for Israel, the sinner, to become

¹ *Antiq. 11:1:2.*

² *Oswalt, p. 21.*

“*the Servant of Jehovah*”? In a similar way to what God did to Isaiah, sanctifying his lips by a firebrand (Is. 6); that he also does with believers, sanctifying them with His redemptive work. Here he presents a correlation between Israel, “the Servant of Jehovah,” and the Messiah, the Savior.

- ❖ In Isaiah 56 to 60: God, who elects His people, and redeems them of their sins, keeps on working, to realize His glory in them, as He had already done with Isaiah in his revelation (Is. 6). Thus, that line is distinct, all along the whole book: the line of amazing salvation, that He realizes through inviting sinners, and sanctifying them, through the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

6. What the critics claim, namely, their theory of denying the unity of the book of Isaiah, confronts several problems with no solutions, of which we mention as examples¹:

a. Their claims flatly destroy the unity. Radday believes chapters 49 to 66, to present a linguistic unit, compared to chapters 40 to 48. If that is the case, he is thus opposing the idea of a second Isaiah (40 to 55). Yet, he believes chapters 23 to 35, not to be written by the first Isaiah, in contradiction of what the majority of critics believe.

b. If this book was written by three authors, it would be very difficult to explain how it turned out to be in its present form. In all versions prior to Christianity, no part of it had been presented as a separate book; all its 66 chapters were always one unit.

c. Morgalioth says that these theories could not explain the existence of certain concepts that are common to different parts; like those of: Is. 1 - 7 with 60 - 66; 7 - 12 with 36 - 39².

d. Certain linguistic studies of this book confirm its unity; as for example that by L. L. Adam³.

The following are few examples of **the similarities of thought and style**, through those parts, claimed by critics to be independently written⁴:

- ❖ Calling God, “*The Holy One of Israel*,” came 13 times in chapters 1 to 39; 16 times in chapters 40 to 66; while it came only 7 times in all the other chapters of the Old Testament.
- ❖ Calling God, “*The Mighty One of Israel*,” came in Isaiah 1 to 24; in Is. 29: 26; and in Is. 60: 26.
- ❖ The use of the expression, “The mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Is. 1: 20; 21: 17; 22: 25; 24:

¹ *The Unity of Isaiah in the Light of Statistical Linguistics*, Hildesheim 1973, p. 274-7.

² Cf. E.G. Young: *Who wrote Isaiah?* 1958, p. 58-60.

³ L.L. Adam & A.C. Rincher: *The Popular Critical View of the Isaiah Problem in the Light of Statistical Style Analysis*, *Computer Studies* 4, 1973, 149-157.

⁴ H. Bultema, p. 368-371.

3; 25: 8) together with (Is. 40: 5; 58: 14).

- ❖ The relationship between God and Israel in chapters 1 to 39, are similar in form and thought to what was mentioned in chapters 40 to 66.

As to thoughts:

- ❖ The children of Israel are the children of God, and His beloved people (Is. 1: 33;
- ❖ 2: 6; 3: 12), (40: 11; 41: 8, 9; 43: 1, 15).
- ❖ Their rebellion: (Is. 1: 17, 23; 3: 12, 15; 5: 7, 23), (59: 8, 13).
- ❖ Their fall into idolatry: (Is. 1: 29; 2: 8, 20; 31: 7), (40: 19, 20; 21: 7; 44: 9 - 20; 57: 5).
- ❖ Shedding of innocent blood: (Is. 1: 15, 21; 4: 4); 9: 3, 7).
- ❖ God rejecting them for their disobedience: (Is. 1: 15; 2: 6; 3: 8; 4: 6), (42: 18 - 25; 43: 28).
- ❖ God delivering them into captivity: (Is. 5: 13; 9: 11, 12; 14: 3), (42: 22; 43: 5, 6; 45: 13).
- ❖ Captivity to Babylon in particular: (Is. 14: 2 - 4; 39: 6, 7), (47: 6; 48: 20).
- ❖ God keeps a remnant for Himself: (Is. 6: 13; 10: 20 - 22; 11: 12; 14: 1, 3), (43: 1 - 6; 48: 9 - 20). The idea of a remnant, to be saved, is a golden thread extending through the whole book.
- ❖ Promise of return, to get them planted in the holy land: (Is. 14: 1; 35: 10), (44: 26; 45: 3; 51: 11).
- ❖ The Gentiles joining them: (Is. 11: 10; 25: 6), (42: 6; 49: 6; 55: 5).
- ❖ A promise of a great king: (Is. 9: 6, 7; 24: 23; 32: 1; 33: 17), (42: 1 - 4; 49: 1 - 12).
- ❖ To reign on the holy mountain of God: (2: 2; 11: 9), (56: 7; 57: 13; 65: 11).
- ❖ To be a Redeemer and Savior: (1: 27; 25: 9, 10; 35: 4), (41: 14; 53: 5 - 12; 59: 20).
- ❖ Use of the symbolic name of Egypt “Rahab” in the two parts: (30: 7), (51: 9).

As to analogies and literate style of writing:

- ❖ Numerous uses of light and darkness, to symbolize knowledge and ignorance. Light allegorically used, at least 18 times; darkness 6 times; and comparing the two 9 times: (Is. 5: 20, 30; 13: 10), (42: 16; 50: 10; 58: 10; 59: 9; 60: 1 - 3).
- ❖ Use of blindness and deafness in similar cases: (Is. 6: 10; 29: 10, 18; 22: 3; 35: 5), (42: 7, 16, 18, 19; 43: 8; 44: 18; 56: 9).
- ❖ Portraying humanity as a flower or a plant leaf, which would soon fade: (Is. 1: 30; 18: 15), (40: 7; 64: 6).
- ❖ Likening reform to lifting up a banner: (Is. 11: 12; 18: 3), (49: 22; 62: 10; 66: 19).
- ❖ Calling the Messiah a “Rod” or “Branch”: (Is. 11: 1, 2), (53: 2).
- ❖ The Messianic era as that of water (rivers and streams): (Is. 30: 25; 33: 21; 35: 6), (41: 17, 18; 43: 19, 20; 55: 1; 58: 11; 65: 12).
- ❖ Likening God to a potter, and man to a pot of clay: (Is. 29: 16), (45: 9; 64: 8).
- ❖ Likening Jerusalem to a tent with anchoring stakes: (Is. 32: 20), (54: 2).
- ❖ Likening the refining of Israel to that of silver: (Is. 1: 25), (48: 10).

These are few of numerous expressions that are common to both the first 39 chapters and the rest of the book, which indicates its unity, and being written by one and the same author. It is to be noticed, that not a single chapter in the whole book, was without such splendid artistic style of narration, especially in its original Hebrew version, which gives them a particular splendor.

Yet, in case there are some difference in style, between the first group of chapters (1 to 39), and the second (40 to 66), that would be only natural, if we take into consideration, the possibility of development of style of the same author, along the successive stages of his life, especially Isaiah, with his long life of prophecy, that extended for about 60 years.

7. The author of the two sections appears to be quite knowledgeable of the history of his people.

8. The author of the second section (chapters 40 to 66) is not, as critics claim, one who lived in the land of captivity, but, on the contrary, he was obviously living in the holy land; and as H. Bullima says,

a. While Jeremiah mentions the name 'Babylon' more than 160 times, we find it mentioned by Isaiah in these 27 chapters (40 - 66) of his book, only 3 times. Isaiah never referred to the cities, villages or castles surrounding Babylon. As to Canaan, on the other hand, references are numerous.

b. The author does not refer to the nations surrounding Babylon, while he does to the mountains, hills, rocks, caves, mountainous roads, and valleys of Canaan.

c. He refers to types of rocks, not found in Babylon; but in Canaan: (Is. 48: 19; 57: 6; 62: 10; 51: 1; 50: 7).

d. As to plants, he mentioned only one kind of Babylon trees, the '*willows*' (44: 4), while he mentioned the various kinds of trees of Canaan several times.

e. As to wood, while palm trees are used for construction as well as fuel in Babylon, Isaiah refers to trees of Canaan as: cedars, cypress, oak, and pine (Is. 44: 13 - 16).

f. These chapters did not mention any of the crops of Babylon, but only those of Canaan.

g. More than 25 kinds of animals, birds, and fish, are mentioned in these chapters, none of which live in Babylon.

h. Speaking of idols, he referred to them as set under trees (57: 5 - 7), in caves, and on mountains and hills. This might be true as far as Canaan is concerned; but, in Babylon, on the other hand, idols used to be set only in massive magnificent temples.

i. In all his numerous narrations, he never mentioned the well-famed world wonders of Babylon, as for examples its walls, unique in their thickness, the temple of Beel, the Neriglisser royal palace, and the (hanging) gardens.

From all that, it is evident that the author of this book, lived in Canaan, and not in the land of captivity, as claimed by the critics, who tend to separate chapters 40 to 60 from the rest of

the book, assuming their author to be a different Isaiah, who lived in the land of captivity, in a later time.

THE MILLENNIUM'S INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

While the Fathers of the early Church considered the prophecies of Isaiah, as true and honest testimonials to the Person of the Lord Christ, and of His redemptive work, many of the recent exegetes, tend to refer to them, as the 'millennium's thought'; believing that his prophecies are, yet to be realized, when the Lord will come to reign 1000 years on earth, prior to the great tribulation. The reasons behind this trend of interpretation are:

a. Interpretation of the prophecies in a literal way; as for instance, the restoration of the glory of Zion and Jerusalem, and the conquest of the Savior over the opposing nations and peoples, etc. These concepts are non-biblical, as Zion and Jerusalem, are actually the church of the New Testament, called 'The New Israel.' As to conquest over enemies, it symbolizes His conquest over the powers of darkness through the cross.

b. They failed to comprehend, that the Lord had already reigned through His cross, over the hearts, and established His Kingdom, filled with unutterable joy and peace.

c. That Satan had already been bound, for believers, through the cross; and we had been given authority "over serpents and scorpions" [See our interpretation of the book of Revelation, chapter 19].

SECTIONS OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

According to Jewish scholars, and to Fathers of the early Church, the prophecies mentioned in this book, came according to the order they were proclaimed to the prophet; while some of the recent critics, refuse this point of view.

Prophecies in the days of Uzziah Isaiah 1- 5.

Prophecies in the days of Jotham Isaiah 6.

Prophecies in the days of Ahaz Isaiah 7-14.

Prophecies in the days of Hezekiah Isaiah 15 - 66.

This book, according to its subjects, could be classified into three integrated sections that demonstrate God's redemptive work. In the first section, the prophet proclaims God's chastisement of humanity as a whole, Jews and Gentiles, on the ground that human nature got corrupted, and became in need of divine intervention to sanctify it. In the second section, the Holy One proclaims the possibility of conquest over enemies (the devil and his hosts), on death, and on the 'ego' attitude, through God Himself. This section is historical and prophetic, revealing that the victory we enjoy, is realized through the Son of David, who dies, and rises again [the story of King Hezekiah, who was granted an extra 15 years of life, symbolizes the

death and resurrection of Christ.] In the third section, God proclaims the enjoyment of salvation, in its wide concept, by humanity-namely, the fellowship of divine glory, through the passion and crucifixion of Christ.

These three sections are:

(1) The Holy Chastiser: Is. 1-35

- a. Prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem 1- 12.
- b. Prophecies concerning surrounding nations 13 - 23.
- c. Prophecies concerning the world 24 - 35.

(2) The Holy Grantor of victory: Is. 36-39

- a. Victory over enemies 36 - 37.
- b. Victory over death 38.
- c. Victory over the “ego” 39.

(3) The Holy Comforter through salvation: Is. 40-66

- a. “Comfort, comfort, My people” 40 - 44.
- b. Cyrus’ attacks Babylon 45 - 47.
- c. Talks of salvation 48 – 59.
- d. Establishing the new city of the Lord 60 – 66.

Some scholars believe that this book represents the Holy Bible as a whole, with its two Testaments: Its first section (chapters 1 to 39), deals with the conditions that prevailed in the old Israel, the extent of its corruption, and the need of the whole world for a divine Savior; thus representing the Old Testament. The remaining 27 chapters (40 to 66), on the other hand, refer to the 27 books of the New Testament that very clearly deal with the mystery of redemption, and proclaim the Messianic Kingdom, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, to establish the new city of the Lord.

THE FIRST SECTION

THE HOLY CHASTISER *ISAIAH 1 - 35*

THE HOLY CHASTISER

Isaiah's aim, was to reveal the gospel of salvation, namely, drawing all humanity to enjoy the Savior, who is capable of reforming human nature, and restoring it to the goodness with which it was originally created, and raising it to the fellowship of heavenly glory.

In order to realize that goal it was necessary to Isaiah, to reveal the extent of corruption, the human nature has reached. That is why, he starts his book by speaking of the situation of God's people, saying, *The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider. Alas, sinful nation.*" (Is. 1: 3 - 4) The ailment has affected the head (the kings, rulers, and all civil leaderships); the heart (the clergy and all religious leaderships); and the rest of the body as well (the people).

Israel followed the ways of the Gentiles, and adopted their transgressions. So did the Kingdom of Judah that became later, far worse than Israel. When God used Assyria as an instrument of chastisement, that became arrogant toward God, He humiliated it through establishing the Kingdom of Babylon. When Babylon, in its turn, became as arrogant, He let Persia and Medes destroy it. Isaiah's prophecies reveal that all nations deserved judgment: Israel, Judah, Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Medes, Edom, etc. The prophet intends to proclaim, that there is no possibility of salvation from that destruction that man brought upon himself, except through divine intervention. Therefore, amid the bitter prophecies concerning chastisements, we recognize two main trends, in these chapters, and in the book as a whole, which are:

1. **Looking forward to Christ, the Savior:** Whenever the prophet speaks of what would happen to the nations, and to humanity, he opens a gate of hope, by prophesying the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of Jesse.

2. **God gets offended by sins;** and would never accept fellowship with sinners, as He is Holy. Yet, at the same time, his hand is stretched for salvation, to sanctify those approaching Him from all nations. In other words, God hates sin; yet, he loves sinners; loves all humanity, and opens His door to the Gentiles. This is what He clearly confirms in chapter 19, where He proclaims Christ's escape to Egypt, and the setting of an altar to the Lord in the midst of the Land of Egypt, saying, *"Blessed is Egypt, My people!"* (Is. 19: 25)

In these chapters (1 to 35), the following are demonstrated:

1. God, in His chastisement, does not avenge; but, as a physician, He cures and heals. That is why His proclamations of chastisement are mixed with those of salvation, in order to spare listeners, falling into despair.
2. Proclaiming His glory to Isaiah, and at the same time His holiness, God intended to proclaim

to humanity that there is no fellowship with glory without sanctification, and the futility of dependence on human arm. For, if we were to get glorified, it would be through God's power, which is glorified by the heavenly hosts; and if we get sanctified, it would be through our fellowship with the Holy One.

3. God, in His chastisements, is like the owner of a vineyard, who yearns to find fruits in His vineyard, beloved to Him, and subject to His exalted care. (Is. 5).
4. Following talk of woes (Is. 10) is a song of salvation (Is. 12), to confirm God's desire to turn chastisement into praise, and sorrow of repentance into joy of salvation.
5. God chastises, but not through orders and warnings, but through a spirit of love. The book keeps on revealing God's intentions through chastising (Is. 25 to 27); seeking an amiable debate between Himself and man.

CHAPTER 1

THE GREAT TRIBUNAL

This book begins by God's proclamation to hold a tribunal for His people, in which He would be both the Prosecutor and the Judge. He does not desire to condemn without giving them the chance to defend themselves. He summons nature, current events, even the unfair judges to testify against His people. Proclaiming accusations, He, at the same time, offers a chance for debate; and opens the door for amnesty, in case they repent. He sits, as the Judge, yet, at the same time, as a Physician and a Savior, opening His arms to receive the fallen souls.

1. Introduction to the Book	1.
2. A summons to nature	2.
3. A summons to animals	3.
4. A description of the conditions of the people 4-9.	
5. a summons to judges	10.
6. Accusation: "Formal worship"	11-15.
7. An invitation to repentance	16-20.
8. An admonition for the past	21-23.
9. The Judge offers Himself as a Savior	24-31.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Is. 1:1)

This phrase is considered as an introduction to the whole book, that embraces a set of visions and prophecies proclaimed to Isaiah on various occasions: in the days of Uzziah, the great king; Jotham, the good king; Ahaz, with his dark reign; Hezekiah, Manasseh etc. But he calls it all, a "vision," because, although they are various visions, yet, they represent one unit, that has one goal, namely God's proclamation of His thought, will, and redemptive plan for edifying the sacred congregation, or for sanctifying the humanity, believing in Him.

Visions here, are not dreams enjoyed by the prophet during his sleep, but are divine proclamations offered to him while awake, although with 'dormant' senses; to say with St. John: *"I was in the Spirit."* (Revelation 1: 10)

He probably meant by vision a divine revelation or prophecy. These visions concerned *Judah and Jerusalem*, that is to say, the Kingdom of Judah, or the southern Kingdom (Judah and Benjamin); concentrating on the capital Jerusalem, being the city of the Lord, embracing His Holy temple. But it also includes prophecies that concerned the northern Kingdom (the rest of the

tribes), as well as the surrounding kingdoms, in relation with the congregation.

These visions are God's word, that does not only concern Judah of the 8th century B.C., but the life of every man, yearning for the salvation of his soul, and for the enjoyment of fellowship with God. And as mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy: "*The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord did not make the covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive.*" (Deut. 5: 2 - 3) It is the word of God and His proclamations to every human soul.

2. A SUMMONS TO NATURE

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: 'I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me'" (Is. 1: 2)

The book begins with a great tribunal; its two parties are: God and man; in which nature-heavens and earth-is summoned to testify. Isaiah might have summoned nature, the way the prophet Moses once did: "*Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of My mouth*" (Deuteronomy 32: 1) As if Isaiah is confirming to his people, that what he says, is but an extension of the words of the prophet Moses, revered by every Jew. He probably wished to underscore the extent of man's hardness of heart, and blindness of His insight, through summoning the solid nature to testify against him; a line that had been, likewise clarified by the prophet Micah: "*Hear, O you mountains, the Lord's complaint. And you, strong foundations of the earth, for the Lord has a complaint against His people*" (Micah 6: 2)

That summons might have executed, through an angel of the Lord, or by the Lord Himself, who did not summon His holy temple, nor His Law, to testify against man, but He summoned the solid nature, that had realized the will of God, and consummated its mission through submission to Him; while man got completely corrupted because of his rebellion.

St. John Chrysostom says, [It is now fitting to summon heavens to testify, as there is no man, who could hear or testify to these affairs¹.]

And **St. Clement of Alexandria** believes that God is summoning 'Gnostics,' namely, believers with heavenly divine knowledge (heavens); as well as those whose hearts are preoccupied with worldly and earthly affairs².

"I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me" (Is. 1: 2)

God does not harbor human feelings; yet, he is not a solid being; He is Love itself; unique in His love toward His heavenly and earthly creation, especially His love for man. That is why, as He talks to us humans, He does that in our human language, to express His love, in human-like

¹ *In Hebr. Hom. 23:8.*

² *Stromata 4:26.*

feelings, to help us get in touch, and to experience fellowship with Him.

God knows, that there is nothing more painful for man, that makes him lose his taste of life, as to feel that he failed in bringing up his children, especially if they rebelled against him. With a vast difference, God reveals how He feels toward the falling man. Man is a beloved son, to whom his heavenly Father offers all possibilities of exalted life, yet he responds to that love with rebellion!

He called His people: “The firstborn” (Exodus 4: 22); and He is calling us His children, as: “(We) did not receive the spirit of bondage... but (we) received the spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Ababa, Father’” (Romans 8: 15)

God expects us to carry the spirit of ‘adoption,’ in response to the unique, compassionate ‘fatherhood,’ that cost Him a great deal, offering His Only-Begotten Son, a Sacrifice, to purchase us as children, in the water of Baptism.

St. Gregory the Theologian says, [As a good Shepherd, you sought the lost sheep; and as a real Father, you labored for me, who has fallen¹.]

St. Cyprian talks to us about our commitment as children of God toward their Father, saying, [If we are children of God; If we have actually begun to be His temples: If we have received His Holy Spirit, we have got to live holy and spiritually².]

God admonishes His children for their rebellion; as the rebellion of children is far bitterer than that of slaves. Wounds of those beloved, especially one’s children, are far more painful than those caused by enemies.

St. Irenaeus believes that God created man, as a son, to Him, and to fulfill His divine will. But, in case he does not glorify God, yet, acknowledges the counsel of the devil, he turns into a son of the devil. That is why Lord Christ called His adversaries, the “*children of the devil*” (John 8: 44); and denied their spiritual reference to Abraham (John 8: 39).

❖ According to nature - to creation - we are said to be the children of God, being all His creation. But, as far as obedience and education are concerned, we are not all, children of God. Only those who believe in Him, and who consummate His will, are His children. Those who do otherwise are the children of the devil and his angels, as they are doing his works³.

St. Irenaeus

❖ When the Pharisees prosecuted our Lord and Savior, He wept for their coming destruction. They mistreated Him; yet, He did not do the same to them, not even under threat; and not even when they killed Him. On the contrary, He felt sorry for their behavior... All these things were

¹ *The Coptic Liturgy of St. Gregory.*

² *On Jealousy and Envy 14.*

³ *Adv. Haer. 4:41:2.*

actually written before their eyes in the Holy Scripture; as Isaiah prophesied: “*I have nourished and brought up children, and they rebelled against Me.*” (Is. 1: 2) They are no longer the people of God, nor a holy nation, but have become: “*Rulers of Sodom... and people of Gomorrah.*” (Is. 1: 10) They even surpassed the transgressions of Sodom, as the prophet prophesied: “*Neither... Sodom, nor... (Gomorrah) have done as you... have done.*” (Ezekiel 16: 48) The people of Sodom opposed angels; but those people attacked God, Lord of all, and their King. They killed the King of angels; not realizing that Christ they killed is still living up to this day¹.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

3. A SUMMONS TO ANIMALS

“*The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider*” (Is. 1: 3)

If God has called Israel His “firstborn” (Exodus 4: 22), it was fitting for the son to know his Father, to comprehend His mysteries, and to respond to His will. But, man, through his rebellion descended to what is far lower than the dumb animals. And as expressed by **St. John Chrysostom**, as man descended to a level lower than that of animals, the Lord Christ adopted our nature, then ascended to heaven, to raise our nature to what is heavenly².

Man descended to a low level, to be addressed by the book of Proverbs: “*Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways, and be wise.*” (Proverbs 6: 6)

The ox and donkey are known for their dumbness, as compared to other animals. Yet, if they get hungry, they instinctively head to their owner, at the place where food is, as though begging him to feed them. But Israel, tasted bitterness in captivity, became hungry and naked; yet, never returned to his Father, who cares for him. What animals do through instinct surpassed that of the reasonable man in his evil.

If man descended to what is lower than animals, the Incarnate Word of God was born in a manger; so that, as man approaches, as though to a manger, would find the Lord Christ, as food for himself. He would eat, and his insight would get opened to comprehend the mysteries of God, through union with the Only-Begotten Son, who is aware of the mysteries of His Father; as it is said: “*No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he, to whom the Son wills to reveal him.*” (Matthew 11: 27)

Here is a divine invitation addressed to us, we, whom the Lord Christ had purchased by His blood, and to whose souls He offered His body and blood as food. Therefore, it is fitting for us to listen to His words and respond to His invitation.

¹ *Paschal. Letters 8.*

² *On the Ascension of Christ.*

St. John Chrysostom compares between the Jews in the Old Testament era and the believers in that of the New Testament, as far as knowledge of God is concerned, to state that the formers “*profess to know God, but in works they deny Him.*” (Titus 1: 16)

- ❖ Their fault does not lie in their mental’ ignorance but in their evil, their evil will; because, even having known Him, they chose to remain ignorant¹.
- ❖ Before the cross, even the Jews did not know the (Father), as it is written: “*Israel does not know,*” but, after the Cross the whole world hastened to Him².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Undoubtedly, the mystery of the Kingdom of heaven had been hidden in the Old Testament, to be revealed in the fullness of time in the New Testament. The apostle says, “*All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ*”(1 Corinthians 10: 4), Christ Himself, was symbolized to them by the Rock; But to us, He was proclaimed by the body³.

St. Augustine

- ❖ How couldn’t you see, how horrible it is, when those who knew God (mentally), failed to recognize Him (on His coming); while the two dumb animals, the ox and the donkey... know the one who feeds them. Israel proved to be dumber!⁴

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ They crowned Jesus, and lifted Him up, testifying to their ignorance⁵.

St. Clement of Alexandria

4. DESCRIBING THE CONDITIONS OF THE PEOPLE

Having summoned nature and dumb animals, to attend God’s tribunal for man, Isaiah revealed the condition reached by the people; as though in a sheet of accusations, that included:

First: He described them, as having seven features (Is. 1: 4); as though saying with the prophet: “*For three transgressions of Judah, and for four... For three transgressions of Israel, and for four...*” (Amos 2: 4, 6) The three refer to the transgressions of the inner soul, which is in the likeness of the Trinity. While the four refer to the apparent transgressions of the body, which is derived from the earth (the four corners of the world); as though the people were defiled from inside and outside, by hidden and apparent sins, in the spirit and in the body.

¹ *In John hom. 50:2.*

² *Ibid, p. 80-1.*

³ *On Ps. 78.*

⁴ *Paed. 19.*

⁵ *Ibid. 2:8.*

The first four features here, refer to the apparent transgressions of the body: ***“Alas, sinful nation; A people laden with iniquity; A brood of evildoers; children who are corrupters”*** (Is. 1: 4) While the later three features, represent the inner transgressions: ***“They have forsaken the Lord; They have provoked to anger, the Holy One of Israel. They have turned away backward.”*** (Is. 1: 4)

Anyway, the figure 7 refers to ‘completeness,’ as though their transgressions have reached the limit. It is to be noticed that Isaiah was fond of figure 7, and used it frequently.

The sheet of accusations included a summary of the following transgressions:

a. Collective transgressions:

“Woe to the sinful nation.” (Is. 1: 4) If the sin of one man ‘Achan the son of Carmi’ resulted in the destruction of the people (Joshua 7: 11), how would it be, if the whole nation deviated to evil?! Corruption infiltrated to priests, as well as to people; to the elite, as well as to the commons. There was need for a communal return to God, the way the people of Nineveh did. The people, who were once called *“the holy nation”* isolated themselves from the Holy One, to carry the features of *‘the sinful nation,’* using the Hebrew word *“goi,”* designating the Gentiles, because of their detachment from God; It is as though that nation deviated from its goal, to enter among those nations, foreign from God.

b. The weight of their iniquity:

“A people laden with iniquity.” (Is. 1: 4) As Isaiah prophesied about the Savior and salvation, he had to demonstrate the heavy weight of transgression, under which the soul is bent. Only God knows the weight of that load. The incarnated Word of God *“the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.”* (John 1: 29, 36)

Beneath the weight of sin souls are bent, to sink deep in the waters of the world; to take on the nature of the world, and not that of heaven. That is why, it was said of Pharaoh and his soldiers: *“They sank like lead in the mighty waters”* (Exodus 15: 10) and of the evil, it is said: *“...and threw the lead cover over its mouth.”* (Zechariah 5: 8)

St. Gregory of Nyssa believes¹, that a man who leads a virtuous life, is spiritually light in weight, while an evil one, is heavy, and would sink in water. Virtue is light, and lifts man up like a cloud, and like a dove flying high with its tiny wings. **Origen** talked profusely of that, demonstrating how Peter was about to drown, because of the sin of doubt; while having been granted faith by the Lord, he could walk on water².

¹ *On Virginity, 18.*

² *In Exod. Hom. 6.*

c. Born and raised up in evil:

“A brood of evildoers; Children who are corrupters.” (Is. 1: 4) Sin was rooted deep in their forefathers’ lives. Successive generations inherited evil. And as the Lord said to the scribes and the Pharisees: *“Fill up then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt; serpents, brood of vipers.”* (Matthew 23: 32, 33)

d. Forsaken the Lord, the Source of holiness:

“They have forsaken the Lord. They have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel. They have turned away backward.” (Is. 1: 4) There is nothing worse for man than to forsake his God, the Source of his life, and Cause of his holiness. God says through Jeremiah: *“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns-broken cisterns that can hold no water.”* (Jeremiah 2: 13)

Isaiah saw God as *“The Holy One of Israel,”* the Source of holiness for His believers. He mentioned this expression twenty times.

e. An incurable ailment:

“Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick. And the whole heart faints, from the sole of the foot even to the head. There is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.” (Is. 1: 5, 6)

By saying, *“Why should you be stricken again?”* God is proclaiming that people rejecting the adoption to God, thus have become unworthy of His care and even His chastisement. He has already chastised them as children, but they have gone ahead in their deviation. Therefore He is going to stop his fatherly chastisement, and to let them get the natural fruit of their corruption, saying with the Psalmist: *“My people would not heed My voice; and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart; to walk in their counsels.”* (Psalm 81: 11, 12) And as said by Jeremiah: *“Why will you plead with Me? In vain I have chastened your children; They received no correction.”* (Jeremiah 2: 29, 30) *“You have stricken them; but they have not grieved. You have consumed them; but they have refused to receive correction.”* (Jeremiah 5: 3)

Now God is giving them over to their corruption, that they have chosen by their own free will; to let the disease infiltrate through their bodies, from the head to the heart, to the sole of the foot. As it infects their minds, they become incapable of discernment; and as it attacks their hearts, their inner feelings and emotions would get defiled; and as it reaches the feet, they would be unable to move towards God, along the royal way of His Kingdom. Corruption has infiltrated to rulers and elite (head), to officers and priests (heart), as well as to the commons (foot); even to those despised among them (sole of the foot).

The wounds turned fatal, and the bleeding non-stop. There is no one to help or save, or to offer the oil of compassion to soothe the painful bruises. Corruption affected the human nature itself, and as said by **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**: [Great is the wound of human nature, from head to foot; there is no health¹.]

f. “Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. Strangers devour your land in your presence. And it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.” (Is. 1: 7, 8)

The prophet is talking of what is to happen to Judah, following the invasion of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, seeing the future, as though it is the present. It is something unavoidable.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, [Isaiah lived 1000 years ago; Yet, he saw Zion as a shed (for cattle). The city, in his time, has been great and beautiful... Yet he says, “*It is left as a booth in a vineyard; as a hut in a garden of cucumbers.*” Look how saints are enlighten by the Holy Spirit!²]

The *land of milk and honey*, the Promised Land, given by God to His people; for the sake of which they had to wander 40 years in the wilderness, has become desolate. Sennacherib seized 46 fortified cities, turning Jerusalem into a ‘besieged city,’ a ‘hut’ or a ‘booth,’ easy to occupy. The people saw strangers (the Assyrians) setting their cities on fire, burning their crops before their eyes. They stood helpless, as their cities were trodden over by strangers, destroyed as Sodom and Gomorrah. That desolation has been a natural result of Judah’s transgressions; an unavoidable consequence of their desertion of God-their sanctification; and of their disobedience to His voice. It was written: “*It shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments... that all these curses, will come upon you, and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.*” (Deuteronomy 28: 15, 16)

That would be the destiny of every soul that isolates itself from the Lord, her God. All her (cities) would be desolate: body, soul, mind, and heart, together with feelings and emotions. Every immunity would be taken away, turning her into a (booth), or an isolated (hut); an easy prey in the hands of sin.

❖ Such are those who defile their souls, turning them from being homes for the heavenly Father, a holy Jerusalem, a house of prayer, into a den of thieves... taking away from it, all

¹ *Cat. Lect. 12:7.*

² *Cat. Lect.*

what is of value, and robbing it of what is best, turning it to nothing¹.

Origen

The expression “*So the daughter of Zion is left*,” here, refers to the people of God, supposed to be His own - the virgin daughter, the cherished bride - that became deserted (left alone), feeling loneliness, which is the severest punishment for a human soul! The daughter of Zion has brought that punishment upon herself. After having been a cherished bride, it became deserted and divorced. **Origen** says, [I assume that the husband (God) has written the certificate of divorce for His ex-bride, placed it into her hand, and drove her out of His house².]

Amid that utter desolation, God finds for Himself a small remnant to testify to Him, for whose sake, he did stop short of destroying His people, that became corrupted; as it is written: “*Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom; we would have been made like Gomorrah.*” (Is. 1: 9) The apostle Paul quoted that phrase in (Romans 9: 29), as though what occurred in the days of Isaiah, repeats itself in all generations, even in the apostolic time, when a small remnant of Jews received faith in Christ.

God does not care for great numbers, but for the small remnant that is sanctified in the midst of corruption that affected many. That remnant is the “*small flock*,” to whom it is the pleasure of the Father to give His kingdom. That remnant, the Lord of hosts kept for Himself, being His work, for whose sanctification He grants His Holy Spirit, to become holy yeast that leavens the whole dough.

❖ Make sure to belong to that chosen remnant; and not to act cool, as loose as many.

Live like the few, to be qualified to enjoy God, “*For many are called, but few chosen.*” (Matthew 20: 16)³

St. John Cassian

For the sake of this small remnant, God will shorten the days of affliction in the last days, as said: “*For the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.*” (Matthew 24: 22)

5. A SUMMONS FOR JUDGES

“*Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the Law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.*” (Is. 1: 10) Fearlessly, courageously, and without flattering, Isaiah summons the rulers of the people, “*rulers of Sodom*,” and calls the people, “*People of Gomorrah*,” because of the oppression and corruption of both the rulers and the ruled.

We shall never find in the whole book a single situation, in which the prophet harbored fear, or showed weakness; except when he saw the Lord Christ in His glory (Isaiah 6). He fears

¹ *Comm. On John, Book 10-18.*

² *Comm. On Matt. Book 14:19.*

³ *Institutions, 4:38.*

God, and not the people.

He sees that the only remedy for both the rulers and the people is the word and Law of God

6. ACCUSATION: FORMAL WORSHIP

The accusation here is very serious. He did not accuse them of idolatry, or of practicing pagan worship, but he is accusing them of hypocrisy, practicing worship with exaggerated accuracy and with a killing literality, presenting sacrifices and burnt offerings, and observing feasts, while their hearts were far from God, and their lives were corrupt.

This accusation is addressed to those who pretend faith in all generations; those who keep the killing letter, while ignoring the inner spirit; as it was said to the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans in the book of Revelation: *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing... and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.’”* (Revelation 3: 17) As he likened to the Pharisee who said: *“God, I thank you that I am not like other men- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess”* (Luke 18: 11, 12)

That accusation motivated the Fathers of the Church to reveal the goal of worship in the life of the church, and to the commitment, not to deviate from the divine goal:

a. **St. Irenaeus** says, [God appears that He is in need of nothing (Is. 1: 11); Yet He urges and advises them to practice these things, in order to get justified, and be close to Him¹.]

God wants us, in our worship, to get close to Him, to unify with Him, to carry His nature in us - the nature of love and mercy. *“He desires mercy and not sacrifice.”* (Hosea 6: 6; Matthew 9: 13) That is why, He rebukes the Jews, saying that although they zealously spread their hands in prayer, yet He does not listen to them, because their hands are full of blood (Is. 1: 15); In place of love, they bore hatred and murder, especially toward prophets and those who speak the word of truth.

❖ Why are these dissensions? Because we observe feasts, yet with the leaven of evil and wickedness; therefore dividing the church into parts; keeping what concerns her apparent things, while putting aside the better things: faith and love. We heard the words of prophecy, that these feasts and fasts do not delight God².

St. Irenaeus

❖ It is obvious for everyone that Law itself, leads one toward justice and wisdom... through

¹ *Adv. Haer. 4:17:1.*

² *Frag. 38.*

invitation to the Creator and Father of the world¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

b. They presented numerous sacrifices and burnt offerings in the temple of God; choosing well-fed cattle. Yet God does not delight in them. He does not request sacrifices for their own sake, as He is in no need of them; but requests them as symbols of the unique sacrifice of the Lord Christ, for the sake of reconciliation of man with God, and enjoyment of fellowship with Him. But the goal was lost from them. When the Victim Christ came, they rejected Him. They offered animal sacrifices, and celebrated the feast of Passover, while rejecting the true Passover - the Lamb of God - who bears the sin of the world.

- ❖ In the days of the Lord, the Jews assumed that they were celebrating the Passover, but they did that in vain, as they prosecuted the Lord. Through their testimony, Passover does not anymore carry the name of the Lord; it rather became “*the feast of the Jews*” (John 6: 4), for they rejected the Lord of the Passover².

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

- ❖ All the sacrifices were stopped, in order that the new Law of our Lord Jesus Christ would be realized, that He consummates, not out of commitment, but through His will, having offered Himself as a Ransom³.

The Epistle of Barnabas

c. They used to celebrate the weekly feasts (the Sabbaths), the monthly, and the annual, counted by God as His feasts, in which He delights in getting together with His people, to fill them with His divine joy. But these feasts ended up to become so hated by God, who “*became weary of bearing them*” (Is. 1: 14), to count them anymore as His feasts.

- ❖ God did not attribute these practices; they used to keep, to Him, but considered them works of sinners, hated by Him... In the law of the Sabbath we read in the book of Exodus: “*Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy **Sabbath to the Lord***” (Exodus 16: 23)⁴

Origen

d. In more than one occasion, God confirms to His people, that when He took them out of the land of servitude, He did not give them the laws concerning the sacrifices, right away, so as not to let them assume, that He did that, out of need for their worship or their sacrifices. **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says that God wished to draw them away from the idol-worshipping,

¹ *Stromata* 2:16.

² *Fest. Letters* 6.

³ *Ep. of Barnabas*, 2.

⁴ *In John, Book 10:11*.

before presenting them with these laws in due time (after their exodus). In spite of that, they forgot the Lord, who performed miracles for their sake in the land of Egypt, and resumed their worship of the calf. The laws concerning sacrifices came after they have got the law, so as not to offer them to the idols, but to the true God. They were required to learn, first to forsake the idols, and to keep God's commandments, before presenting burnt offerings and sacrifices (Jeremiah 7: 28)¹.

- ❖ He did not accept your sacrifices, nor did He order you to offer it out of need, but because of your sins².

St. Justin, the Martyr

e. He says, "***Who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?***" (Is. 1: 12)

They used, frequently, to enter into the temple, to offer countless sacrifices; only to be seen by God - in their non-repentance - as animals trampling and defiling His house. Offering sacrifices, to seek reconciliation with the Lord, caused them to come under His wrath.

They came with offerings of incense, assumed to symbolize prayers, but "*They turned their back (to the Lord), and not their face.*" (Jeremiah 2: 27) Their incense turned to become hated by God, as it bore the smell of hypocrisy and non-repentance.

- ❖ Actions, done in a way, that is against the will of God, or offered in a way, lacking due respect, are in no avail... God is in no need of anything; He had enough of their hypocrisy³. (Is. 1: 11)

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

- ❖ The Lord our God, does not delight in keeping such things. If there is anyone among you, who is a thief, or vows in vain, let him stop that; and if any of you is an adulterer, let him repent; then he could keep the sweet and true Sabbaths of the Lord. If any of you have impure hands, let him first wash up and purify⁴.

St. Justin the Martyr

7. AN INVITATION TO REPENTANCE

God exposed them before themselves, revealing the magnitude of their corruption. Yet, He did not destroy them through despair, or wound their souls; but through fatherly love, He offered them the cure, in order to get them back to their good nature, with which He created them. That cure was repentance, springing from faith, and mixed with love. Its stages are:

¹ *Fest. Letters 12.*

² *Dial. with Trypho, 32.*

³ *Fest. Letters 12.*

⁴ *Dial with Trypho, 12.*

a. **Washing:** saying, **“Wash yourselves.” (Is. 1: 16)** By that, He does not mean those purifications commanded by the Law. In His accusation, He asks them not to stop at the outer forms of worship, but He means **‘the washing of Baptism¹,’** through which we take off the ‘old man,’ to carry in us the ‘new man,’ who is in the likeness of our Creator. That is what the Lord meant by saying to the human soul: *“I washed you in water”* (Ezekiel 16: 9). In the same book, He says, *“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. I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you.”* (Ezekiel 36: 25, 26)

In the Old Testament, priests could not enter into the tabernacle, unless they first wash with water *“lest they die.”* (Exodus 30: 19 - 21) And the Psalmist says, *“I will wash my hands in innocence; So I will go about Your altar, O Lord.”* (Psalm 26: 6)

It is an inner washing, of which **St. John Chrysostom** says, [He does not mean the type of washing as practiced by the Jews, but the washing of conscience².]

“Wash yourselves.” (Is. 1: 16) If through Baptism, we were granted the ‘new man,’ we get a new possibility to lead a new life in Christ, which is the innocence of heart, as a condition to behold God; as He says, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* (Matthew 5: 8)

❖ As you get in that great and good baptismal font, run respectfully in the race of goodness; as the Only-Begotten Son is here, and is ready to save you, saying, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,”* (Matthew 11: 28) you have been putting on the coarse garment of your iniquities, and bounding yourselves with the ropes of your sins. But hear now the words of the prophet: *“Wash yourselves; Cleanse your hearts; and your sins will be wiped out before My eyes.”* The angels will then sing over you saying, *“Blessed is he, whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered.”* (Psalm 32: 1) You, who light up the flare of faith; keep them lighted in your hands³.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ Therefore, if, through being washed in that mystery Baptismal font, as said by the prophet, we get our will purified; and evil uprooted from our souls, we would turn by that into better men⁴.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

b. **“Put away the evil of your doings, from before My eyes.” (Is. 1: 16)** As man is

¹ Justin: Apology 1:61; Greg. Naz. Oration on the Holy Lights 20; Cyril of Jerusalem: Cat. Lect. 1:1 etc.

² In John Hom. 70:2.

³ Cat. Lect. 1:1.

⁴ The Great Catechism, 40.

granted the innocence, through which he can see God, he becomes capable of discerning works of God from those of evil; to reject all what is evil, so as not to falter between the two ways: of God and Satan.

Through our getting the mystery of washing and cleansing, we would be granted a divine possibility for serious work, for the sake of discovering ourselves in God, to enter into a continuous washing (through repentance), and to purify all what has to do with evil inside us. By confessing our transgressions to God, we would enjoy continuous ‘ascensions’ toward Him, to be able to behold Him face-to-face.

- ❖ As you can see, it is within your authority to place in your hearts either ‘ascensions’ - namely, thoughts that belong to God, or ‘descents’ - namely, lowly thoughts of carnal and earthly things¹.

Abbot Serenius

By confessing our transgressions, and putting away our evil, we can behold God proclaiming Himself and His glory within us; and as **St. Augustine** says, [Reveal yourself to Him, who knows you; so that He would reveal Himself to you, who do not know Him².]

“Cease to do evil.” (Is. 1: 16) Through genuine repentance, we isolate evil from God’s eyes. The sign of our loyalty to Him is to cease completely committing any evil doing. This is a divine gift, not granted unless sought after with faith and persistence.

- ❖ He desires to offer the chance of repentance to His entire beloved, confirming it by His capable will. Therefore, let us obey His great and glorified will; and as we beseech Him asking for His mercy and compassion, forsaking all wrong doing, animosity, and envy, that lead to death, we get back to Him, casting ourselves under His mercy³.

St. Clement of Rome

c. **“Learn to do good.”(Is. 1: 17)** The negative side of repentance is not good enough, namely, ‘to put away evil, and to cease doing it.’ But here, there is a commitment to act positively: to carry within us the mark of Christ, the Truth; to seek it, namely, to seek our Christ, living and working in us; to practice the work of Christ, the lover of mankind, who cares for the afflicted, the needy, and the weak. That is why He commands us to **“Seek justice; Reprove the oppressor. Defend the fatherless.; Plead for the widow.” (Is. 1: 17)** This is the positive repentance, through which we get back to God; not just to cease doing evil, but to extend - as well - our hands with practical love and mercy, especially towards the helpless and widows.

¹ Cassian: Conf. 7:4.

² On Ps. 104.

³ Ep. 1:8,9.

- ❖ Let us all, extend our hands - men and women - to them, and take good care of them, to gain for ourselves a great (store) of compassion; as the tears of widows are capable of opening wide the gates of heaven itself. Let us not trample on them, and increase their burden of sorrow. Let us help them as much as we can¹.
- ❖ You should see, how God, in every occasion, takes notice of works of compassion. These are points credited to the wrongdoers².

St. John Chrysostom

d. The practical love toward the afflicted and the helpless is a natural reaction to our experience with God, the compassionate, who modestly seeks debating with us as friends. He opens the gates of His mercy before us - sinners, saying, **“*Come now, and let us reason together,*’ says the Lord, *‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’*” (Is. 1: 18)**

This is a straightforward evangelistic invitation, proclaiming God’s longing towards the salvation of everyone, who receives fellowship with the Holy One through the cross.

God, in His love, even though He has confirmed the horrible judgment against the children of Judah, yet, He promptly seeks reconciliation. He is not, like man, who confronts stubbornness with stubbornness, and anger with anger, but pours soothing oil over the inflamed wounds to bring back every soul to Him.

God asks man to converse with Him, when we see certain Christian rulers, sometimes, close their doors before those who wronged them; and some even spiritual guides and parents, harbor that strange spirit, foreign from the Spirit of God, the lover of mankind.

God desires to wash the blood of our sins (scarlet and crimson), with His blessed blood, to turn it white as snow, and pure like wool; to become His shining clothes, as in His transfiguration.

Some see, that the expression, *“Let us reason (Cheyene) together”* here implies putting an end to debate; as God knows that man got no more to say, because of the enormity of his sin, which became as evident as un-erasable scarlet color. That is why He wants to get him out of his tight corner; to open before him the gate of divine forgiveness, in order to spare him any embarrassment. What an amazing love!

With His invitation to reason together with Him, He is asking us to judge ourselves by ourselves; as when we acknowledge our transgressions, and, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*(1 John 1: 9) To condemn ourselves, so that He would not condemn us.

¹ In John hom. 70:3.

² In Heb. Hom 12:7.

- ❖ I wish, nobody loses hope, even if he reaches the limit with his evil. Even if he carries the evil nature itself, he should not despair... The power of repentance is so immense, to turn us into the whiteness of snow, and the purity of wool, even if the sin reigned over us and tinted us¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He overlooks our evil doings; goes on having compassion on us, motivating us to repent².
- ❖ It is only within the authority of God to forgive us our sins; and to accuse us of transgressions; He orders us, every day, to forgive our repenting brothers their transgressions, to forgive us our own (Matthew 6: 14)³.

St. Clement of Alexandria

e. **Sanctifying human freedom:** God opens the gates of His love before all. Yet, He does not force anyone to do His will. He asks for the human heart as an optional offer. He presents the way, grants the possibility of action; and at the same time, a freedom of choice, saying,

“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Is. 1: 19)

- ❖ As you can see, we should at first purify ourselves (that is to say carry a holy will) so that God would purify us⁴.
- ❖ We are our own masters; we can turn every organ in us into a tool of evil, or into a tool of righteousness⁵.
- ❖ We can change, all of a sudden, from clay to gold. Whatever concerns virtue or evil, is not compulsory by nature, but could be easily acquired... I know that everyone wishes, he could fly to heaven, as from now; but there is need to show a will to work⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ By what He says in Isaiah 1: 19 He confirms that consent or refusal, depend on us⁷.

St. Clement of Alexandria

It is to be noticed that the stages of repentance mentioned in Isaiah 1: 16, 17 are seven: two negative in 1: 16 (namely, washing, and rejecting evil doings), and five positive ones in 1:

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Exhort. To Heath, 10.*

³ *Who is the rich that shall be saved? 39.*

⁴ *In Hebr. Hom., 12:7.*

⁵ *Ad pop. P.G. 49:66,67.*

⁶ *In John 1:5.*

⁷ *Stromata 1:19.*

17, that should be practiced.

8. AN ADMONITION CONCERNING THE PAST

Here, he compares between the conditions of Jerusalem before, and how it ended up, through deviation and evil ways in words laden with sympathy and deep sorrow. The prophet Isaiah is totally straightforward; yet full of love and compassion!

a. Jerusalem, that has been “*the faithful city*” (1: 21), has become like “*a harlot*.” He likened it to a bride, who has been once loyal to her heavenly groom, keeping His commandments, and proclaiming His splendor and glory through her life; then she ran after another (pagan worship), to get defiled by spiritual harlotry with her lovers (see Ezekiel 16: 25, 32, 36). After being a virgin, united with her Groom, the Grantor of sanctification, she left Him to unite with abominations.

❖ You can say that God, the Logos, has abandoned the Synagogue of the Jews that became like a harlot. He deserted it, to take for Himself a (harlot wife) from the Gentiles. Because these who were called before, “*Zion the faithful city*,” became harlots; while those, became like Rahab, the harlot, who received the two spies of Joshua, and got saved with all her household (Joshua 6: 5)¹.

Origen

b. It has been indeed, “truly full,” and “justice lodged in it;” but now “*murderers*” (Is. 1: 21). It has been a dwelling place for the Holy One - who is the “Truth” and “Justice,” for God to dwell and find comfort; but has turned into a place for murderers; that is why God says, “*The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*” (Luke 9: 58) When it is holy, she could say, “*(My beloved)... lies all night between my breasts*” (Song 1: 13) while when defiled, its heart “between her breasts,” turns into a dwelling place of evil.

c. Falsehood infiltrated into it, so that its silver has become dross, having the brightness and appearance of silver, but lacking its material and value. *Its wine got mixed with water* (Is. 1: 21), though having the color of wine. That is a portrait of caring for the appearances of worship, and literalism of keeping the commandments, without caring for the depths. Our Christ turns water into wine, while the evil one turns wine into water.

Silver refers to the words of God (Psalm 12: 6); and wine to the joy of the Spirit. The superficial man keeps the words of God, and probably knows them by heart, yet he does not carry Christ “the Word of God” in his heart, or in his behavior. He has the appearance of spiritual joy; yet he is quite far away from the joyful heavenly life, and from the fellowship of angels and

¹ *Comm. On Matt. Book 12:4.*

saints in the Lord.

Silver refers to the treasures of the rich; and wine to love and emotion. The one, superficial in his faith, restores to wisdom of the world, as a false treasure, that has the appearance of valuable silver, while it is nothing but ‘dross;’ he looks as though he is full of love and emotion, while his heart is full of water (with no warmth).

St. Irenaeus believes that the elders of the Jews, used to mix the wine of the simple commandments of God, with water of human traditions, contrary to the word of truth¹. **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, [We are not like many others, who corrupt the word of truth, and mix wine that “*makes glad the heart of man*” (Psalm 104: 15) with water; that is we do not mix our teachings with anything cheap, valueless, lowly, worn-out, and tasteless².]

d. “*Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves.*” (Is 1: 23) They eat with thieves, and watch on over their clothes, while they are stealing. It was fitting for princes and rulers, to take care of people’s concerns; but they turned their interests toward getting more authority and wealth. They may not, themselves, steal, yet they let the evil one, with his soldiers, rob the people, without paying much attention, because of their love for authority. They are fond of bribes and material benefits; and do not care for orphans and widows. The worldly glory had distracted their minds away from their duty towards them. They turned Jerusalem, “the Church of Christ,” into a place of injustice, cruelty, and violence. The leaderships, instead of being living models for their people, in submission to the word of God, and in practicing life of piety, they became an offense for them. According to **St. Irenaeus**: [The scribes and Pharisees, began, since Law times, to despise God and refuse His words; namely, they did not believe in Christ³.]

9. THE JUDGE PRESENTS HIMSELF AS A SAVIOR

Before this horrible situation, God does not stand tied-handed; but the “*Lord of hosts,*” the “*Mighty One of Israel*” (Is. 1: 24) will act with strong hands to save His people.

It is to be noticed here, that:

a. God, has been called by three names: The “*Lord*” (*Jehovah*), the “*Lord of hosts,*” and the “*Mighty One of Israel.*” Some scholars see in that, a concealed reference to the Holy Trinity: The *Father*, the ineffable, and the unseen (*Jehovah - I am who I am*); the *Word*, incarnated to lead the battle against the devil, granting His hosts every spiritual victory; and the *Mighty Holy Spirit*, who works in believers, to liken them to the form of Christ, to let them find a share in the Father’s bosom.

Jerusalem has also got three names: “*the faithful city;*” “*the city of Justice;*” and “*Zion,*

¹ *Adv. Haer., 4:12:1.*

² *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus, 46.*

³ *Adv. Haer. 4:1:6.*

redeemed with justice” (Is. 1: 26, 27).

So also the evil ones, they were called by three names: **“the transgressors;” “the sinners;”** and **“those who forsake the Lord”** (Is. 1: 28).

b. God counts those who corrupt His people as a heavy burden. He does not stop resisting evil, until He and His people find comfort: **“I will rid Myself of My adversaries; and take vengeance on My enemies” (Is. 1: 24)**

The inside of God stays compassionate on His people, until He destroys evil.

c. **“I will thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy.” (Is. 1: 25)** He recreate human nature, to restore to the Church its original beauty, as though by the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit; He purifies us through chastisement, even though it may seem cruel as fire.

- ❖ Fortunate is the man who is chastised in this life, as God does not punish for one offense twice¹.
- ❖ A father does not chastise his son unless he loves him. A teacher does not care for a student unless he sees in him certain signs of promise. And when a physician ceases to care for a patient, it is to be taken as a sign of despair in his chances to be cured².

St. Jerome

- ❖ God rebukes to reform and reforms to preserve us from Him³.

St. Cyprian

e. **“I will restore your judges as at first” (Is. 1: 26)** When man is restored to his dignity and reason - as he has been when he was first created, he would become like a wise judge.

f. Jerusalem, namely, the human soul, would be restored to its title: **“The city of righteousness, the faithful city.”(Is. 1: 26)** The Church - the New Jerusalem - would be the city of God, the column and base of truth; the bride, faithful to her groom. It would be filled with the penitents and the redeemed, those bearing in them the righteousness of Christ. As to those who have forsaken and rejected the Lord, they will have no place in the true Church, no share in the heavenly Church.

“For they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees, which you have desired; and you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens, which you have chosen.” (Is. 1:29) They would be filled with shame, having coveted the world - the terebinth trees - considering them their

¹ On Ps. Hom, 51.

² Ep. 118:1; 22:39.

³ Ep. 7:5.

paradise. They lost the world, as well as their hope. He likens the world to a terebinth trees, as the Jews used to worship the 'Baal' and 'Ashteroth' under the terebinth trees.

Why did he liken those who have forsaken the Lord to, ***“a terebinth tree whose leaf fades, and a garden that has no water”*** (Is. 1: 30)? God created man as a paradise, wherein He finds a sweet fruit. All energies, possibilities, emotions, and instincts, that man carries, all of them are gifts from God, just like trees planted in a paradise, irrigated by the water of the Holy Spirit, to give as fruits-blessings with no limits. But, if he denies the Holy Spirit, its trees will dry up, to be burnt by fire, as though turning into a ***‘tinder,’*** (Is. 1: 31) namely, the leftovers of linen, after being combed, to be used as fuel for fire.

CHAPTER 2

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOUSE

In chapters 2 to 4, Isaiah concentrated his attention on Jerusalem, '*the mountain of the Lord's house.*' Although he had not deserted it, yet, his longing for it, and his yearning for its sanctification, had not been less than that of the prophets of captivity, who existed physically in exile in Babylon, while their hearts were attached to the city of God that had been destroyed.

- 1. Introduction** **1.**
- 2. The mountain of the Lord's house** **2-5.**
- 3. The reasons behind God's rejection of His people** **6-9.**
- 4. Vanity of leaning upon human arm** **10-22.**

1. INTRODUCTION

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw, concerning Judah and Jerusalem." (Is. 2:

1) The heart of Isaiah has been preoccupied with the people of God (Judah), and with the holy city (Jerusalem). He has been filled with sorrow for, how the conditions turned to be; he saw people, struck by corruption, and a city, whose spiritual temple had been devastated; for which he felt pain in his soul.

Because of that pure love, God granted him insight, and gave him visions and prophecies, in order to comfort him and every wounded soul; For the sake of humanity; God presented him with His life-giving word:

- ❖ The (Logos) came to (Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah) to enlighten those prophets with the light of knowledge, and to let them see things, they could not then comprehend¹.

Origen

2. THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOUSE

What did God offer Isaiah, whose soul was wounded? He carried him, in Spirit, to the fullness of time, to behold the new Judah - the Lord Christ, and the new Jerusalem, where the temple of the Lord would be built, and where God's kingdom would be established in the heart, to behold the holy congregation, from all nations and peoples, flowing to worship the Lord with Spirit and Truth, in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. That is why he said: ***"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house, shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to***

¹ Comm. On John, Book 1 2:1.

it.” (Is. 2: 2)

Some scholars believe that Isaiah might have quoted this prophecy from the prophet Micah (Micah 4: 1 - 5); or the two of them might have quoted it from a previous source. But, what is against the probability, that the Holy Spirit might have granted the same gift - the prophecy - to the two prophets, as well as to others? who got the loyal heart, inflamed toward the salvation and edification of man; for Isaiah to present it in the days of Ahaz, and for Micah, in the days of Hezekiah, in confirmation that, whatever the inspiration utters, shall never fall¹.

God drew Isaiah’s heart toward the fullness of time, to behold the Lord Christ, on whom, personally, He would establish His Church, being ‘*the Rock of generation;*’ the mountain seen by the prophet Daniel, “...*cut out without hands... and filled the whole earth.*” (Daniel 2: 34, 45) “...*they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10: 4) on which the serpent would never crawl, to approach His people.

St. Augustine says, [The mountain, as we are taught by the prophetic testimony is the Lord Himself².]

❖ Many mountains are unknown, although found at certain locations on earth... but that particular mountain is not so, as it is filling the whole earth; of which it is said: “...***established on the top of the mountains... and all nations shall flow to it.***” (Is. 2: 2)

Who cannot comprehend the identity of that mountain?

Who would get his head broken, struggling against it?

Who is ignorant of that city, established on the mountain?

Do not get amazed, when you see how that city is not recognized by those who hate the brothers; by those who walk in the darkness, not knowing where they are heading; the darkness has blinded their eyes, so they can not see a Mountain.

Do not get amazed; they are with no eyes, how? Because darkness has blinded them, proved by their hatred for the brothers³.

St. Augustine

God established His Church, when He went up on the Mountain of Temptation (Matthew 4: 8), to grant her the spirit of victory and conquest over the forces of darkness. **St. Jerome** says, [He did not go up that mountain, against His will, or as a captive, but was led by a yearning to the battle.] Also, according to **St. John Chrysostom**: [Satan went to Adam to tempt him; but as Satan can not approach Christ, Christ Himself went to him.]

He also established His Church on the “**mountain of learning**” (Matthew 5: 1), where He presented His people with His commandments, the mystery of life. He also established His

¹ *Ironside, p. 18, 19 ; Bultema, p. 50, 51.*

² *Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 39:2.*

³ *In 1 John, hom, 1:13.*

Church on the “**Mount of Tabor**,” where He proclaimed His splendor, and entered with His Church into heaven itself (Luke 9: 41); and lastly, on the “**Mount of Golgotha**,” where humanity enjoys her slain Groom, her Savior, through His precious blood. On that mountain, He stretched His hands on the Cross, “*to draw all people to Himself.*” (John 12: 32) So the prophet proceeds to say, “*All nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord; to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways.; And we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion, shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.’” (Is. 2: 2, 3)*

It is known that the Law came out from the Mount of Sinai for the Jewish people; but here, he is talking about a new Law, to come out of Jerusalem, for the whole world.

- ❖ This new Law does not belong to one nation, but to all nations. The law, and the Word of God are not confined anymore to Zion and Jerusalem, but would extend to the whole world. That is why the Savior Himself says to His frightened disciples, “*These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms concerning Me.*” (Luke 24: 44, 47) This is the global way for the salvation of the soul that was previously proclaimed by the angels and saintly prophets¹.
- ❖ There (in Jerusalem), He told His disciples, “*Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28: 19)².
- ❖ The Holy Spirit, after the resurrection of Christ, had to be given in the same city, where the new Law - the New Testament - starts. The first Law, known as the Old Testament, was given, through Moses, on the Mount of Sinai, while this one, was given by Christ, according to the prophecy, that from Zion, the Law would be given, and from Jerusalem, the word of the Lord³.

St. Augustine

In this Church, established on the Mount of Golgotha, and set forth from Jerusalem, bearing the power of the Holy Spirit, the following features are to be noticed:

a. A well-founded Church: “***On the mountain of the Lord’s house.***” (Is. 2: 2) It is called by the apostle Paul, “The Mount of Zion,” saying, “*You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.*” (Hebrew 12: 22, 23) The

¹ *City of God, 10:22.*

² *In John tr. 6:9.*

³ *City of God 18:54.*

mystery of its power, and its well foundation, is the Lord Himself, who sanctifies it for Him, and exalts it to His heavens, to bear His features.

b. **“Exalted above the hills.” (Isaiah 2: 2)** It became the light of the world, proclaiming the truth with no fear (Acts 16: 26). Its members are living in body on earth, while their hearts and minds are exalted as though on the top of mountains. And as expressed by the **Origen**: [It is enough for you to know that you do not anymore stay on earth, dwell in the valleys, nor linger in submerged places¹.]

c. Attractive to nations and people (Is. 2: 2, 3); its gates open to all, bearing motherly love toward all humanity, drawn from the love of its Groom, for all human kind.

d. Its consistent work is to lift people up (Is. 2: 3), descending to them, through love, without losing its holiness or heavenly nature; to lift all, by the Holy Spirit of God, to the higher Jerusalem, to practice the new heavenly life in Christ Jesus.

e. Its message is proclaiming the way of God (Is. 2: 3), bearing His word to every soul, and presenting His commandment to every believer to live by, and to enjoy the law of freedom. (Galatians 4: 26)

f. Proclaims the just ordainments of Christ, where believers of all nations submit to His kingdom, and His unique spiritual authority.

g. Grants peace among believing souls, who do not see any human enemies against them. That is why he says **“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Is. 2: 4)** A Christian’s heart would be filled with peace, even toward his adversaries; so that his inner energies would be transformed from animosity to constructive work; from tools of war to producers of prosperity.

The word of God turns earth into heaven, so that heavenly peace would dwell in the life of man, and the joyful kingdom of peace, or the kingdom of God, would be established within them, never to be shaken by animosity of people, or by severity of events.

❖ From Jerusalem, only twelve men emerged to the world; illiterate, having no talent of public speech. Yet, with the power of God, they proclaimed to all men, that Christ sends them, to teach people the wisdom of God. As for us, who were before, fighting each other, did not only stop that, but also abstained, even, from lying or deceiving, even before the jury. We became ready and willing to die witnessing to Christ².

¹ In Num. Hom 3.

² Apology 1:39.

St. Justin the Martyr

h. Enjoying Christ, “*the light of the Lord,*” saying with Isaiah: “***O, house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the Lord.***” (Is. 2: 5) The Lord Christ dwelling in His Church is “*the brightness of (His Father’s) glory, and the express image of His Person, and upholding all things by the word of His power*”(Hebrew 1: 3). He is, “*The Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.*”(Malachi 4: 2) He shines on His Church to turn it into light to the whole world; to present light to those sitting in the darkness of sin; and to present its Christ to everyone.

This invitation addressed to the house of Jacob, to walk in the light of the Lord, is an invitation to lift the veil of the letter from the Law, in order to discover the “Messiah,” hidden behind the words, to enjoy the words of God, not as literal commandments, but as a fellowship with Christ, the true light.

Who is “*the house of Jacob*”? St. Justin the Martyr answers: [It is fitting for us to notice two descendants of Judah, as well as two houses of Jacob; one born of flesh and blood, while the other of faith and Spirit¹.]

3. REASONS BEHIND GOD’S REJECTION OF HIS PEOPLE

The prophet compares between the actions of his contemporary people, and those of future nations, who would receive faith in God the Savior; would enter the Kingdom of peace, and enjoy the exalted blessings, through dwelling in the mountain of the Lord’s house.

The house of Jacob, practically rejected God, despite their strong interest in the literality of worship; so were rejected by God. That symbolized the rejection of the Jews the Person of Jesus Christ, in pretense of their defending the truth, and their zeal for the Law of Moses.

God presented four reasons for rejecting His people: their imitating strangers; love for the world’s richness; leaning on their military abilities; and their receiving pagan worship.

a. Imitating strangers: “*They are filled with eastern ways.*” (Is. 2: 6)

God elected them to fill them with His Spirit, to bear His heavenly wisdom, and to be witnesses of the truth, and a holy leaven for the world. But they opened their doors for foreigners, especially those of the east, learning their magic practices, their pagan worships, and their abominations, instead of testifying the word of God to them. For the sake of material benefits, and to indulge in their abominable practices, they encouraged foreigners to live in their midst, and to mix with them (Hosea 7: 8), betraying the divine covenant.

He also says, Instead of coming back to God in all matters, they imitated the Palestinians at that time. They followed the way of fortune – telling, opposing the divine commandments

¹ Dial. with Trypho 135.

(Leviticus 19: 26), ***“They are soothsayers like the Philistines.”*** (Is. 2: 6)

b. Love of the world and material richness: ***“Their land is also full of silver and gold; and there is no end to their treasures.”*** (Is. 2: 7) Their hearts got filled with the love of wealth, assuming that in it, they would find fulfillment; taking, in their minds and feelings, the place of God.

c. Their leaning on their military abilities: ***“Their land is also full of horses; and there is no end to their chariots.”*** (Is. 2: 7) They leaned on horses and chariots, instead of having faith in God.

d. Their receiving pagan worship: (see Isaiah 2: 8)

These are the reasons behind the rejection of God to His people. The consequence of that was a continuous fall, instead of growth and pride (Is. 2: 9); and a collapse in all aspects of life in place of complete sanctification in the Lord ascending to heavens.

4. VANITY OF LEANING ON THE HUMAN ARM

God rejected His people because they insisted on rejecting Him by all means. Yet, God still keeps His love and compassion for them and for all human kind, proclaiming His salvation of man.

Whenever man starts feeling great in his own eyes, and his ‘ego’ starts to swell, God proclaims His splendor, before which man would get humbled to his real size. ***“The haughtiness of men shall be bowed down.”*** (Is. 2: 10) When God appeared to Abraham, the Patriarch comprehended that he was just dust and ashes. and when Moses saw the glory of God, he got terrified and trembled. So also Job’s soul stuck to dust. Nothing destroys man’s pride, like his encounter with God; yet, his soul gets cured, and filled with hope in the Lord.

What is the rock in which we hide before the divine splendor, but the Lord Christ? As in him, we find for ourselves, a refuge before divine justice. That is why, when the prophet Moses desired to behold the divine glory, he was told: ***“You can not see My face, for no man shall see Me, and live... Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock (Christ is our rock). So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand while I pass by”*** (Exodus 33: 20, 21)

As long as we lean on our Christ, the true Rock, and abide in Him, and He puts us as though in a cleft within Him, we shall be able to behold the divine glory. But if we lean on ourselves, or on a human arm, we shall perish and be denied beholding God.

The prophet portrays the haughtiness of man as:

a. ***“The cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and... all the oaks of Bashan.”*** (Is. 2: 13) A reference to leaning on the rich natural resources, as well as to arrogant kings and

rulers, like Rabshakeh (2 kings 18: 19).

b. ***“The high mountains... and the hills that are lifted up.”*** (Is. 2: 14) Probably it is a reference to pride and violence of small and great nations.

c. ***“Every high tower, and every fortified wall”*** (Is. 2: 15) A reference to leaning on works of self righteousness, by which man is capable of rising up to fortify himself against every enemy; and probably also to fortified cities.

d. ***“All ships of Tarshish and... all the beautiful sloops.”*** (Is. 2: 16) It is a reference to preoccupation with trade and business together with luxury and wealth, at the expense of caring for one’s soul.

All these analogies are going around man’s boasting about himself, and of his natural abilities and resources; assuming with his continuous progress, that he is capable, by himself, of creating an atmosphere of fulfillment, happiness and peace, together with security and stability in this world, disregarding the divine arm. That is why he is in need of God, to be transfigured in him, to reveal to him that all these things are perishable, particularly in the great day of the Lord.

Pride was connected to pagan worship; thus the prophet confirms, that when man realizes the helplessness of idols, he, instead of taking them on his travel to support him, or dignifying them in places of worship, ***“he will cast them away... to the moles and bats.”*** (Is. 2: 20)

Finally, man realizes the futility of leaning upon human arm; thus the prophet says, ***“Sever yourselves of such a man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he?”*** (Is. 2: 22) Let every man be silent no matter how great he is or may be his ability and richness, for when he dies, he is no more in the world, and his soul leaves his body that returns to dust. ***“Their breath is taken away; they die and return to their dust.”***(Psalm 104: 29)

CHAPTER 3

A DEVASTATING FAMINE

God created the world, with all its seen and unseen possibilities, for the sake of man's peace and happiness, in order that every human being would find joy in his beloved God; lean on Him, and enjoy a deeper fellowship of love. But as man got preoccupied with the grant, rather than with the Grantor, he leaned on "the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water" (Is. 3 : 1). He started to boast about his riches, capabilities, much experience, and beauty, instead of having pride in the Lord, and of leaning on Him, God took back His gifts, and denied man His temporal blessings, not to avenge him, nor to humiliate him, but to motivate him to return with his heart to God, the Source of his life, satisfaction, peace, joy, and glory; so as to earn, in this world, many folds, and in the coming an eternal life; to gain God Himself, as his portion and inheritance.

Here, the prophet warns of a coming famine, of need, and of destruction of the twelve pillars, on which people lean: [bread, water, mighty men, warriors, judges, prophets, diviners, elders, captains of fifties, honorable men, counselors, skillful artisans, and expert enchanters.] Through famine, God has taken away the natural resources, and through captivity the human resources, in the hope of their eventual return to Him.

1. Denying them the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water

1.

2. Denying them the mature leadership 2-15.

3. Denying them possibilities of luxury and haughtiness 16-26.

1. DENYING THEM THE WHOLE SUPPLY OF BREAD AND THE WHOLE SUPPLY OF WATER

"For behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah, the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread, and the whole supply of water." (Is. 3: 1)

When God allows, for Jerusalem and Judah, His bride people, to get in need of bread and water, it is as though, through destroying their support and cornerstone, He is hoping for her return to "*lean on her beloved*" (Song 8: 5), to find in Him her satisfaction from hunger and quenching from thirst.

He took away from His people the existence of meat, celery and onions, by taking them out of Egypt, to grant them, instead, the heavenly manna in the wilderness, and led them to a land of milk and honey. He denied them water of rivers and drains, to provide them with a rock to follow them and to flood them with water, and that rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10: 4). God

denies us worldly support, to give us instead, Himself, as our support, Heavenly Bread, and the Living Spring, that quenches the thirst of our souls with its full capacity.

Here, the prophet warns of a coming famine, as a fruit of rebellion (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28) that was realized by the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem. More serious, was a famine for the word of God, prophesized by Amos: “*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God; that I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.*” (Amos 8: 11)

❖ The Word of the Lord is food for the soul, its ornament and security; being deprived of it equals famine¹.

St. John Chrysostom

2. DENYING THEM MATURE LEADERSHIP

God, set up for His people, mature and capable leaders: like Moses, the great among the prophets; David, the righteous king; Deborah, the prophetess and judge, etc. But the people went astray, together with their military, judiciary, civil, and spiritual leaders. They leaned upon human arms, minds, and capabilities, with the assumption that despite their and their leaders’ corruption. They would succeed and progress. That is why God took away from them the mature and wise leaders, leaving them to set for themselves weak and incapable ones, in order to let them feel the need for divine intervention, even in order to enjoy lively and powerful leadership.

“Takes away the mighty men and the man of war; the judge and the prophet; the diviner and the elder; the captain of the fifty and the honorable man; the counselor and the skillful artisan; and the expert enchanter.” (Is. 3: 2, 3)

Through this, He probably did not mean to drive them away, or to have them killed, but to deny them what He granted them, of powers and capabilities; to weaken the mighty; to let men of war be defeated before the enemy; to deny judges the wisdom; and to corrupt the insight of the false prophets etc. Through all that, the people would earn the fruit of leaning upon human arms; when they find themselves falling internally and externally.

That is what would happen to a man who rejects the work of God in him: He would be denied the divine grace (the mighty), and the fellowship with the heavenly (spiritual warriors); to find himself without divine help or heavenly support; would lose the gifts of the Spirit: wisdom (the judge); discernment (the prophet); capability of taking decisions (the diviner and the elder); He would feel failure, even in his worldly work (the skillful artisan); and would be incapable of, even giving a speech (the expert enchanter). In other words, man would lose his life and natural abilities; would lead a life of inner emptiness, corruption and failure, despite his apparent enjoyment of appearances of strength, wisdom, wealth and success.

¹ In Matt. Hom 2:10.

And now, as God takes away the mature leaders, and man loses the grace of God, what would happen then?

a. ***“I will give children to be their princes; and babes shall rule over them” (Is. 3: 4)***

When Rehoboam the son of Solomon was reigning he listened to the counsel of young men, and rejected that of wise elders - full of love and compassion (1 Kings 12). That led to dissension of the people; to national war between the tribes; and to prevalence of animosity instead of love and unity.

God loves young people, supports and cares for their continuous growth. So, what “children and babes” mean here is a lack of maturation in spirit and thought. St. John the Baptist, was still a fetus in his mother’s womb, yet spiritually mature enough to testify to the Lord Christ; While many of the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and mature priests - age wise but not spirit wise - behaved as children, seeking to get rid of the Lord Christ, by killing Him. Actually, we find, all along the history of God’s people, since the dawn of creation, many young mature leaders, when grown-ups and elders, behaved with immature spirit of children. That is why the apostle Paul advises all believers: men, women, children, elders and youth to *“Be men”* (1 Corinthians 16: 13); namely, *“Be mature and spiritually strong.”*

Origen comments on the categories of people, included in the census in the book of Numbers, (only men, excluding women and children), saying, [This text teaches me that once I surpass the simplicity of childhood, that is to say, have no more childish way of thinking, when I *“became a man, and put away childish things”* (1 Corinthians 13: 11), became capable of *“overcoming the wicked one”* (1 John 2: 13), I am worthy to be counted among those said to be *“walking strongly.”* and to be included in the divine census. While those who have swaying carnal thoughts would not be worthy of being counted before God, as holy and consecrated¹.]

Isaiah might be referring here to Manasseh, who reigned at the age of twelve, after the death of his father king Hezekiah.

b. ***“The people will be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbor. The child will be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable.” (Is. 3: 5)***

A sign of losing the mature and wise leadership is a lack of good judgment, and a prevalence of the law of oppression, and the spirit of chaos among the congregation, as well as within man himself. When there is no genuine and true leadership, every man would seek what is his, at the expense of others; and every one would count himself as being wiser and better than others.

I say that, when man loses the leadership of the Holy Spirit the law of selfishness, oppression and rebellion, would dwell inside him, to get him into unlimited conflicts between his soul and his body, and between his reason and emotions. The body rebels against the soul, seeks

¹ In Num. Hom. 1.

to overcome and control the whole life of man, submitting him to carnal desires.

c. **Getting into a severe condition of despair** during which every one would refrain from taking responsibility, when a man takes hold of his brother, saying, ***“You have clothing; You be our leader.”*** (Is. 3: 5) Yet, because of the miserable conditions prevailing in the country, with the inability to take decisions, every one would respond to that by saying, ***“I can not cure your ills, for in my house is neither food nor clothing.”*** (Is. 3: 7) Thus, as all have become naked and hungry, who would accept the government? Who would then take over himself curing the illness of people, when he has neither food nor clothing? That is a natural fruit of seeking a human savior, on the assumption that he would be capable of rescuing and leading his life, forsaking the unique divine Savior. The Psalmist says, ***“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.”*** (Psalm 146: 3)

d. **A loss of feeling**, of shame, and fear of God: ***“They declare their sin as Sodom. They do not hide it.”*** (Is. 3: 9) Jerusalem had stumbled and fallen into offenses several times, not out of weakness or ignorance, but intentionally and shamelessly saying and doing evil, to provoke the Lord (see Isaiah 3: 9). This is a portrait of our modern world, where many young people feel that all forms of transgressions they commit are their natural right.

He says, ***“The look on their countenance witnesses against them.”*** (Is. 3: 9) Simply looking at their faces would reveal the finger prints of sin, and their lack of grace; and, according to the words of the Holy Scripture: ***“The children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.”*** (1 John 3: 10)

Although the evil ones are manifested, and are the majority, yet, there is still a holy remnant for God, whom He would never ignore; who would never be wasted nor harmed; of whom the prophet says, ***“Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with them. For they shall eat the fruit of their doings.”*** (Is 3: 10) In the midst of severe affliction, God would keep His righteous ones, and turn everything to their benefit and glory. Joseph, the righteous, has suffered much; yet his sufferings were, themselves, a way to his glory. So we hear him say to his brothers: ***“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”*** (Genesis 50: 20)

“(God) does not slay the righteous with the wicked” (Genesis 18: 25), but guards His righteous ones at the time of temptation... ***“hide (them) in the pavilion, in the mystery place of his tabernacle.”*** (Psalm 27: 5) He recognizes them because ***“He inscribed (them) on the palms of His hands.”*** (Is. 49: 16)

St. Justin comments on the words of the prophet: ***“Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves. Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruits of their doings.”*** (Is. 3: 9) [Indeed your hand is raised to do evil. You have killed Christ and did not repent. You steal as much as you can, hate and kill those who believe in

Him, and in God the Father of all; and still curse us, and those who take our side for no reason. As for us, we pray for your sake, and for the sake of all mankind, as we were taught by Christ, the Lord, who instructed us to pray even for our enemies, and to love those who hate and curse us¹.]

St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, [They tied up Jesus, and brought Him to the Hall of the high priest. Do you want to know that this had been written and prophesied? Of which Isaiah says, “*Woe to their soul, for they have brought evil upon themselves, saying, Let us tie up the righteous for he causes us trouble*”².]

They thought that they were doing evil to the righteous, when they were actually doing it to themselves; to eat the fruit of their doing, not as a divine punishment but as a natural fruit of their behavior and life: “***Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him.***” (Is. 3: 11) “*Whatever man sows, he will also reap.*” (2 Corinthians 9: 6)

e. **Love of authority**, and not the loving care: True rulers are like Fathers who should embrace all their children, and present their own lives for the sake of their subjects. But when they lack the grace of God, they turn - even the religious rulers - into oppressors, interested only in keeping their positions, under the pretense of defending the truth, dignity of authority, and their right to sever the evil. They turn from being giving fathers, into what is more like little children, submitted to the ‘ego’ attitude, or into what likens women (as a symbol of body weakness), who seek authority; saying, “*As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy way of your paths.*” (Is. 3: 12)

Some scholars believe that all that, have actually been realized; as kids reigned on Judah, and as some women carried out serious roles in running the government. As to the symbolic side, rulers here, especially priests and prophets, were overcome by the spirit of arrogance and love of authority, and deviated from true love and honest care. In their hypocrisy, “*they say to the wicked, ‘You are righteous’*” (Proverb 24: 24), “*In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.*” (Ecclesiastes 3: 16)

In the middle of that corruption, especially by leaderships, God intervenes for the sake of the simple among His people. He holds a tribunal for the rulers, being the vinedressers who devoured the vineyard, instead of caring for it. Rebuking them He says, “*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.*” (Ezekiel 34: 2, 3) They robbed the rights of the poor, as did Jezebel, when she took possession of

¹ *Dial. With Trypho* 133.

² *Cat. Lect.* 13:12.

the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite (see 1 Kings 21); “*Crushing My people, and grinding the faces of the poor.*” (Is. 3: 15)

3. DENYING THEM THE POSSIBILITIES OF LUXURY, AND HAUGHTINESS

After talking of holding a tribunal for the corrupt leadership he started to deal with the haughty women of Zion, who were probably behind the corruption of those leaders. The women of Zion, forgetting their reference to Zion and to God, behaved as pagans, with haughtiness together with enjoyment of luxury and fun.

St. John Chrysostom says, [These words were not addressed to them alone, but to every woman imitating them. The apostle Paul likewise takes the role of a prosecutor, saying to Timothy, “*(I desire) that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing.*” (1 Timothy 2: 9) Wearing gold is generally harmful, and in particular when a woman enters a church, and passes by the poor. Do you like to become the subject of accusations: as bearing the appearance of cruelty and lack of humanity?¹]

St. John Chrysostom believes that our life is meant to be spent in spiritual strife, and not in luxury of clothing and haughtiness in walking². We should now be striving, as though in a spiritual battle, not caring for outer appearances, but for gaining victory and conquest, as the time will surely come for public glory.

Once again, the same saint asks us to focus our eyes on our Christ, to care for the inner adornment fitting for Him, and not for the outer appearances. [Christ is your groom, O virgin, why should you care for attracting human beloved?³]

The prophet present us with some features of corruption, that characterized the daughters of Zion:

a. Haughtiness: “*The daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks.*” (Is. 3: 16) Overcome by pride, they haughtily walk with outstretched necks, forgetting how the necks of their Fathers and mothers were once bent beneath the yoke of servitude in Egypt. “*Pride goes before destruction; and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.*” (Proverb 16: 18, 19)

b. Mincing eyes (Is. 3: 16): They were preoccupied with hunting for the hearts of men, as a natural fruit of the emptiness of their hearts. They set with their eyes death traps, according to

¹ In 1 Tim., Hom. 8:3.

² In 1 Tim., Hom 8.

³ Ibid.

what the teacher says, *“I find more bitter than death, the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her.”* (Ecclesiastes 7: 26)

The word ‘mincing,’ originally means, beautifying the eyes with a black powder; as the people of the east were fond of wide eyes that are surrounded by black circles¹.

c. Wantonness in walking: ***“Walking and mincing as they go; making a jingling with their feet.” (Is 3: 16)*** A reference to corruption of the inner heart! They used to walk haughtily and arrogantly, wearing on their legs something that makes them jingle, to draw attention towards them.

What would God do to such arrogant girls who walk in wantonness?

* ***“The Lord will strike with a scab, the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will uncover their secret parts.” (Is. 3: 17)*** Baldness for a girl is a sign of ugliness; as God granted a woman hair as a crown of glory, to lead a life of respect and love in the Lord; to be loved and respected by her husband, living with him on equal terms, being like the body, that is indispensable to the head. But, if she, wantonly and arrogantly, deviates from the natural law, she would lose even her natural beauty and her dignity, to become like bald. Uncovering her secret parts refers to exposure of the corruption of her nature; with no one to cover and protect her, to give her his name in marriage.

That is the situation of the human soul, fallen with pride; as it loses God’s gifts, and as the corruption of its nature is exposed, becomes of no beauty, strength or dignity; to be mocked by the least of sins, and wasted, even by imaginations and day dreams.

* Taking away all appearances of wealth and ornamentation, and fancy underwear, to turn ugly and exposed, in the hope that she might return to God, praying to be covered by Him; and to *“put Him on”* (Galatians 3: 27; Colossians 3: 10).

“In that day the Lord will take away the finery: The jingling anklets, the scarves, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the veils; the headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; the perfume boxes, the charms, and the rings; the nose jewels, the festal apparel, and the mantles; the outer garments, the purses, and the mirrors; the fine linen, the turbans, and the robes.” (Isaiah 3: 18 – 23)

God allows that chastisement for the daughters of Zion, to let them find in the Savior, the source of their adornment and glory.

Here, he refers to what has happened to the daughters of Zion during captivity, when they were forced by the enemy to work unceasingly; their perspiration turning smelly, saying, ***“Instead of a sweet smell, there will be a stench.” (Is. 3: 24)*** This is what actually happened. But, spiritually speaking, the arrogant soul would lose its deceiving outer adornment, to have the

¹ Bultema, p. 70.

stench of its nature, its poverty and nakedness, exposed, in the hope that it would feel the need for a Savior to redeem her and satisfy her needs. And as it is said to the angel (bishop) of the church of the Laodiceans: “*Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked - I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see*”(Revelation 3: 17, 18)

St. Gregory of Nazianzus speaks of the sanctification of our sense of smell, so that the sweet fragrance of the Holy Spirit would not forsake us, to leave us with the stench of our own nature. He says, [Let us be cured, as far as our sense of smell is concerned... Instead of getting covered with dust, let us smell the fragrance of the ointment that was poured upon us, which we spiritually received, to be newly recreated; to smell sweetly ourselves¹.]

The prophet says, “***Instead of a sash a rope.***” (Is. 3: 24) Instead of being adorned with golden sashes, the daughter of Zion got bound with ropes, to be drawn to captivity in humiliation. What a painful portrait, that reveals the fruits of sin!

“***Instead of well-set hair baldness.***” (Is. 3: 24) As a sign of humiliation, the hair of the elite women is cut to turn them ugly.

“***Instead of rich robe, a girding of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty.***” (Is. 3: 24) So, instead of magnificent garments they were clothed with sackcloth; and their foreheads and hands were branded, as a mark of servitude. Slaves, of both sexes, were branded with a special brand, to designate the master to whom they belong.

All that describes how their life got completely destroyed, as a fruit of their leaning upon outer appearances, and upon human arms. That is why he says, “***Your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty in the war. Her gates shall lament and mourn, and she being desolate, shall sit on the ground***” (Is. 3: 25, 26) Men died, women were captivated, and the great city turned as though empty!

¹ *Oration on the Holy Baptism, 38.*

CHAPTER 4

“THE BRANCH OF THE LORD” IS THE CURE

In the previous chapters the Holy Scripture presented us with a painful portrait of the corruption and deterioration, that got into man because of sin; as man lost his beauty, dignity, food, drink, adornment, and even his life itself. The only cure, lies in the coming of the Lord Christ, “*the Branch of the Lord,*” to restore to man the beauty of his nature, and to fulfill him, not through certain goodies, but through offering “Himself,” the Source of life, joy, and satisfaction.

1. The need of a Savior 1.
2. The Branch of the Lord 2.
3. The holy remnant 3-4.
4. Dwelling of the Lord Christ in the midst of His Church 5.
5. The Church of Christ a tabernacle, and a refuge 6

1. THE NEED OF A SAVIOR

“And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, ‘We will eat our own food, and wear our own apparel. Only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach.’” (Is. 4: 1)

These seven women are all the nations including the Jews. All felt a great void swaying their depths, because of the corruption of human nature. These nations gather together, as a bride seeking her groom, requesting His name to take away the reproach of her corruption; then, to eat her own food and wear her own apparel. Christ is much more important than all her needs, in whom to find all satisfaction, cover from nakedness, and protection from every reproach.

That is according to the spiritual symbolic side. But as far as the literal side is concerned, the prophet Isaiah is prophesying what is going to occur to Judah; when, as a result of devastating wars, a great number of men would be killed; and every woman would yearn for a man to take refuge under his name, whatever much it would cost her. She would be ready to share him with six other women, which is against the nature of a female; and even relieving her husband to be, of any commitment concerning feeding or clothing her; for she will care for herself, again, something against nature itself. All that is in the hope of getting children from him to take away her reproach (Genesis 30: 33; 1 Samuel 1: 11).

2. THE BRANCH OF THE LORD

Now, if humanity, with all its nations (seven women), have discovered the need of a Savior; here is the prophet, giving the good news of His coming: *“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.” (Is. 4: 2)

By that day he means “*the fullness of the time*” (Galatians 4: 4), when the Only-Begotten Son of God would be incarnated, He, who is called “*the Branch of the Lord,*” or the “*Branch*” (Jeremiah 23: 5; Zechariah 3: 8; 6: 12). He is the Branch of the Lord, and a Branch of Righteousness of David; as He is the eternally Begotten before all time, of the same essence as the Father; and through His incarnation, He was born as a descendant of David.

By His coming to the world He proclaimed the divine splendor and the exalted glory, to the simple foreign believers, as well as to the loyal among the Jews. And as Simon, the elder said: “*A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles; and the glory of Your people Israel*” (Luke 2: 32)

That Branch has been planted through His incarnation, to dwell among us, to reflect the divine splendor upon our nature; so He says to His Church: “*Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you.*” (Ezekiel 16: 14)

The word ‘Branch,’ also designates (Nazareth). So the evangelist says, “*that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’*” (Matthew 2: 23)

3. THE HOLY REMNANT

Who will enjoy the Branch of the Lord?

“***Who is left in Zion, and he who remains in Jerusalem.***” (Is. 4: 3) These are the few who received faith in the Lord Christ, among the Jews. They remained in the spiritual Zion, in the Church, the New Jerusalem.

According to the letter, this refers to the remnants remaining after the captivity; but spiritually, they are the holy remnant, the small flock, whose heart does not desert Zion, and whose spirit does not leave Jerusalem. Of that remnant, several prophets spoke (Zechariah 13: 9). It has been found in every era. In the days of Elijah, God proclaimed that He has seven thousand believers whose knees had not knelt to the Baal. In the days of captivity, there were Daniel and the three young men, among those holy remnants, also Esther and Mordecai. After the captivity, we also hear about that holy remnant (Malachi 3: 6; 4: 2). The Lord Christ Himself speaks about that little flock, to which the Father’s good pleasure is to give the Kingdom (Luke 12: 32).

In brief, every loyal soul, that lifts her heart up to the exalted Jerusalem would behold the Holy Church in the Lord, to find in it joy and pleasure.

The heart of Isaiah was attached to Jerusalem, the capital of his nation, and the city of God that embraces His holy temple; and got bitter because of its corruption. And now, as he proclaims the coming of the “*Branch of the Lord,*” he beholds a new Jerusalem, dwelt by saints in the Holy Lord, to enjoy the eternal life. He says, “*...will be called holy, everyone who is*

recorded among the living in Jerusalem.” (Is. 4: 3)

The Church - the icon of heaven - is the pledge of the exalted Jerusalem; not to be entered by any thing defiled, nor liars, but those who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7: 14).

As members of the holy Church - the New Jerusalem - we enjoyed the ointment of the Holy Spirit of God, to consummate the evangelic commandment: “*As He who called you is Holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.*” (1 Peter 1: 15)

Who would sanctify our life? The Lord Himself; as the prophet says, “***When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning.***” (Is. 4: 4) He washed our filth in the water of Baptism, in the worthiness of His blood; and is still washing all our weaknesses by His blood that flowed from his stabbed side, mingled with water. If our hands got spoiled with blood through our sins, He offers His blood as atonement for our sake, to set us a glorious Church, with no defilement or wrinkles, but in every respect sanctified.

That washing or purification is realized “*by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning.*” As to the spirit of Judgment, it has been realized by His being nailed on the Cross, to bear the price of our sins in His body, consummating divine justice what we due on Him. As to the spirit of burning, it refers to what has been proclaimed by the law in the Book of Leviticus, concerning the ‘burnt offering,’ where the sacrifice is wholly burnt, as a reference to complete love. The sacrifice of Christ, in our name, is the ‘burnt offering,’ offered as a sign of our complete love in Him towards the Father. And by the ‘burnt offering,’ He also probably means the fiery Holy Spirit that descended over the Church, to sanctify and wash every member of it.

❖ In the fulfillment of time, as the time for freedom came, the Logos Himself washed the filth of the daughter of Zion, as He washed, by His hands, His disciples’ feet (John 13:5)¹.

St. Irenaeus

❖ The excellent spiritual washing through Baptism takes away the corruption of the soul².

St. Clement of Alexandria

St. Clement of Alexandria comments on the expression: “*purged the blood of Jerusalem,*” by saying, [Here is the blood of the crime of killing the prophets³.] Whoever denies Christ is partaking of the killing of the prophets with his fathers; But whoever receives Him, is purified and sanctified in his depths.

¹ *Adv. Haer. 4:22:1.*

² *Paed. 3:9.*

³ *Ibid.*

4. DWELLING OF THE LORD IN THE MIDST OF HIS CHURCH

The Church is washed up by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, namely through the unique burnt offering presented by the Lord Christ, and through the work of the Holy Spirit in the water of Baptism. She seeks the dwelling of Her Victim Groom in her midst, covering her by day as a cloud, and by night as a pillar of smoke and a pillar of fire, to illuminate the way for her. Thus, the Church goes with its memory back to the tabernacle amid the wilderness, where the Lord used to meet with His people. Yet, it is a new tabernacle, on a level different from that of the Old Testament, concerning:

a. “*Above every dwelling place*” (Is. 4: 5): The divine presence or dwelling is not any more confined to a tabernacle nor a temple, but dwells in His Church, that extends everywhere, east and west; in the hearts of priests and congregation; its doors open before all peoples and nations wherever they are.

b. “*and above her assembly*”: Referring to the work of God in the Church as one assembly, or one congregation; every member enjoying the gift of the divine presence, not as an isolated individual, but as a living member in the congregation, binding with all the other members through the Head, the Lord Christ; having his personal relationship with God, that makes his relationship with his brothers much stronger.

c. “*(Creating)... a cloud and smoke... and the shining of a flaming fire*”: The Lord Christ is the Source of protection and enlightenment of His Church.

d. “*For over all the glory there will be a covering*”: By that he means ‘*the royal daughter is all glorious within the palace*’ (Psalm 45), namely hidden. From outside, sharing her Christ’s passion, cross, death, and tomb; to be said of her, as of her Groom: “*has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.*” (Isaiah 53: 3) Yet, from within, she partakes of the glory of His resurrection.

The soul that appreciates the value of the inner glory of its Christ, and the joy of His kingdom within it, covers it, on account of its great value. We are used to hide and treasure what is valuable, while what is valueless is in no need of any cover. The Church, amid its preoccupation with its glorified Christ, says, “*He lies all night between my breasts*” (Song 1: 13). It wants Him within its depths, hidden in her heart.

5. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AS A TABERNACLE FOR SHADE AND A PLACE OF REFUGE

God dwells in His Church, turning it into a tabernacle for shading the afflicted souls from the heat by day, and a shelter from storm and rain (Is. 4: 6).

St. John Chrysostom sees that tabernacle as the great cloud of saintly witnesses (Hebrew

12: 1), saying, [Remembrance of the saints, upholds the soul, weighted by afflictions; becoming like a cloud, that protects it from the severe heat of the burning sun¹.]

¹ *In Heb. Hom.*, 28:3.

CHAPTER 5

SONG OF THE VINEYARD

In the previous chapter, Isaiah got in touch with the exalted love of God towards His people, proclaimed through the divine incarnation, for the sake of sanctifying humanity, “*by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.*” By that, the insight of the prophet became open to the love of God for His bride, or His vineyard; to start singing the song of the vineyard, or the song of the lover for the desired vineyard.

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| 1. God’s care for His vineyard | 1-2. |
| 2. A tribunal between God and His vineyard | 3-7. |
| 3. A detailed parade of Israel’s transgressions | 8-23. |
| 4. A divine chastity | 24-25. |
| 5. The Assyrian invasion | 26-30. |

1. GOD’S CARE FOR HIS VINEYARD

“Now let me sing to my well-beloved. A song of my beloved regarding His vineyard: My well beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it. So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes” (Is. 5: 1, 2)

This song proclaims the story of divine love; as God loved man, and still loves and protects him; and shall keep loving him; while man met love with dryness. That story has been realized with our first parents, Adam and Eve; and also with the people of God, in their early days. Thus it is said by the prophet Moses “*For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance; He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness. He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.*” (Deuteronomy 32: 9, 10) God got His people out of servitude, not only to get them to a land of milk and honey, but to establish the Church of the New Testament, that fills the whole world, to enjoy the inner kingdom of God, as said by the Psalmist: “*You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land*” (Psalm 80: 8, 9)

It is obvious, that the vine here refers to all the people: the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. **Now, what did God present to His beloved people?**

a. He set them “*on a very fruitful hill*” (Is. 5: 1); having taken them into Canaan, the land of milk and honey. What has befallen them of draught and famine is not due to the nature of the

land, nor the surrounding circumstances, but as a fruit of the people's sins.

God set the Church of the New Testament on a very fruitful hill; He lifted her heart up as though to heaven, to let her children enjoy the fat of heavenly life, to get fulfilled and in need for nothing.

b. **“He dug it up”** (set a wall around it) (Is. 5: 2). That wall is the Law, by which God surrounded His people in the past, to spare them mixing with the pagan nations around them, thus copying defilements. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says, [The Law is a wall destined for security (Is. 8: 20)¹.] **St. Ambrose** believes that the wall is [the divine care to protect the vine against the attacks of the spiritual beast².] And, according to **St. Jerome**, it is [the guard by the angels³.]

c. **“And cleared out its stones.” (Is. 5: 2)** The stones here refer to pagan worships with its stone idols; which were uprooted by God from among His people; or uprooted His people from it, that all may practice a sanctified proper life. Stones may also refer to the nature of violence and hardness that the Lord Christ wishes to uproot from every heart, through the work of His Holy Spirit. The prophet Ezekiel says, *“I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh”* (Ezekiel 11: 19) This new heart and new spirit (Ezekiel 36: 26) would be realized through our getting the new spiritual birth in the holy water of Baptism. **St. Cyprian** says, [It is the Baptism, where the old man would die, and the new one would be born. And the apostle proclaims and confirms, that we are being saved through *“the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”* (Philemon 3: 5)⁴]

d. **“Planted it with the choicest vine,” (Is. 5: 2)** that is, He planted it as one of the best kinds of vine. As a chosen people, they were granted a covenant with God, to bear the “truth” in him; according to the words of the Lord: *“I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality; How then have you turned before Me, into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?”* (Jeremiah 2: 21)

As to the Church of the New Testament, the “Truth” Himself, the incarnated Word of God, came to present Himself as a vine, carrying us in Him living branches that bear much fruit (John 15: 5).

e. **“He built a tower in its midst,” (Is. 5: 3)** where the owner of the vine or its guardian is stationed, to guard it against the attacks of thieves and wild beasts. Some scholars believe that the tower is the prophets, priests and all the spiritual and civil leaderships, who were supposed to take care of the flock, and to keep it against the little foxes that disrupt the vines.

¹ *In Eph. Hom., 5.*

² *In Luke, 20:9-19.*

³ *Catena Aurea. St. Mark Ch. 12.*

⁴ *Ep. 74:5.*

In the New Testament, the tower is the altar of God set within the soul, on which a believer offers his prayers, fasts, gifts, and all his life, as a burnt offering to the Lord, through his union with the slain Christ. Through that spiritual tower, the Church of Christ, in every heart, is kept strong and active; where believers enjoy the fellowship and union with the Lord himself.

f. ***“And also made a winepress in it,” (Is. 5: 2)*** to press the grapes and to make the wine of love, that is offered for spiritual joy. What is that winepress, but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *“has trodden the winepress alone; and from the people no one was with (Him)”* (Is. 63: 3). He offered His shed blood, as a wine of love, to bring joy to every believer’s heart.

St. Ambrose says, [He made a winepress, because the mysteries of Christ’s Passions are like new wine... The congregation thought that the disciples were drunk, as they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 3: 13). He dug a basin for a wine press to pour in it the inner fruit¹.]

St. Irenaeus says, [God planted the vine of mankind, when He first created Adam, and elected the fathers. Then He presented it to the hands of vinedressers, when He set the Mosaic ordinance; and fenced around it by presenting special instructions to worship Him; built a tower through selecting Jerusalem; and dug a vine press, as He set a container for the prophetic spirit. He sent prophets prior to the Babylonian captivity, then more prophets during and after it, seeking fruits².]

Now, What did the vine present to its owner?

“He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes.” (Is. 5: 2)

The Lord expected to reap love for His love; repentance and atonement in response to His forgiveness of sins. But He got instead stony hearts that does not make fruits worthy of repentance. *“There is none who does good, no not one.”* (Psalm 53: 3) Thus it was fitting for the Word of God to descend to us, as a new vine. He alone can plant us in Him to bear much fruit (John 15: 5).

- ❖ When He says, *“I am the true vine,”* (John 15: 1) He undoubtedly designates Himself from that, to whom He addressed the words: *“How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine? “As how could a true vine, expected to produce good grapes, produce thorns instead?³*
- ❖ In place of fruits, it produced sin⁴.

St. Augustine

- ❖ I yearned, for the vine to produce wine, but it gave thorns. You can see the crown that adorns

¹ In Luc. 20:9-19.

² Adv. Haer., 4:36:2.

³ On John tr., 80:1.

⁴ In Ps. 80.

My head!¹

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

2. A TRIBUNAL OF GOD FOR HIS VINE

There is nothing more difficult for a father than to enter into a tribunal with a beloved son. Yet, because of the hardness of man's heart, God sought to debate His people, asking: ***“What more could have been done to my vineyard?”*** (Is. 5: 4) The strange thing is that He left the verdict to the other party, to His oppressors, to condemn themselves by themselves. That is the way of God in dealing with us; He exposes us before ourselves, and reveals our weaknesses before our eyes; letting us condemn ourselves by ourselves; not out of desire to punish or conquer us, but to seek our return to Him, and to enter into a relationship of love with Him.

What more could God have done for us?! He created us from nothing; brought us forth according to His likeness; delivered to us the earth with all that are on and beneath it; set the stars for our sake; and when our nature got corrupted, He sent us His Law and prophets; and finally He came by Himself, to write the song of His love by the blood of His body on the cross!

As the vine did not find what to answer the owner of such amazing love, **He began to proclaim His chastisements, in the hope that the vine would respond; which are:**

a. To ***“take away its hedge... and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.”*** (Is. 5: 5) If “the angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him,” (Psalm 34: 7) and the Lord Himself “will be a wall of fire around (His people),” (Zechariah 2: 5) yet, He with His love would forsake the oppressors, and deny them the heavenly guard, to let them feel their weakness, with no hedge or wall, prone to the wild beasts to trample as though in a wilderness, hoping for their return to God to ask for His refuge. If man denies the grace of God, his soul which is opened to the love of the world becomes without a wall, for the herds of dirty pigs to freely enter and exit; his heart to get trampled by desires; his thoughts to be swayed by defilements; and his senses to descend to uncleanness. As **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, [These things, namely, breaking down the wall, and allowing enemies to enter, are realized through divine consent, in order to turn everything to the good; [divine care is a punitive art².]

b. ***“I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug.”*** (Is. 5: 6) As the Lord forsakes His vineyard, that is the human soul, it turns into a void and counted as desolate; to be lamented by the Lord, as He did with Jerusalem, saying, *“Your house is left to you desolate.”* (Matthew 23: 38)

When the vineyard produces fruits, the Vinedresser carries out a process of pruning and

¹ *Cat. Lect.*, 13:29.

² *Stromata*, 4:12.

digging, so as to make it more productive. But if it gives wild grapes, he would not bother with it. Pruning and digging refer to the compassionate chastisement of the Lord toward His children. When we walk along with Him, He stretches His hand to take care of us, and also to chastise us, in order to be more productive of the fruits of the spirit.

Refraining from pruning and digging refers to a refrain from chastisement, which is the severest of punishment: completely ignored, and counted unworthy even of being chastised. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says, that when a physician stops administering the bitter medication, or using the scalpel, that would mean that the condition of the patient turned utterly hopeless.

c. **“There shall come up briers and thorns.” (Is. 5: 6)** This is the fruit of man’s desertion and separation from God; he starts to produce briers and thorns. As the apostle says, *“As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.”* (Romans 1: 28)

What are those thorns but a loss of peace of mind, to carry inside troubles and worries, with which man cannot cope on his own?

d. **“I will also command the clouds, that they rain no rain on it.” (Is. 5: 6)** In the Old Testament, rain refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit¹. A man who denies the Lord, who seeks to be separated from Him, would lose the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in him; to have his heart turn desolate, not bearing the fruits of the Spirit. So in place of *“truth”* he would produce *“blood shed;”* and in place of *“justice”* he would produce *“oppression”* and *“weeping”* (Is. 5: 6). The Lord seeks to find in us His fruitful paradise in Spirit, where the soul addresses Him, saying, *“Let my beloved come to His garden; and eats its pleasant fruits.”* (Song 4: 16)

But, the soul denies the spiritual rain, would turn the cheerful paradise into a horrible place, where there would be nothing but bloodshed and continuous weeping.

St. John Chrysostom believes that rain in the Holy Scripture refers to preaching². Thus when man denies God, he would deny himself enjoyment of His preaching within his depths. He reads the word of God, and may study it, yet he would not enjoy its activity and sweetness in his depths. That is what **St. Augustine** proclaimed³ in his first homily on the gospel according to St. Matthew, saying that he has been like a small bird in its nest. In the pride of his heart, he sought to fly on his own, studying the Holy Bible with the spirit of criticism; to end up falling down on the ground; and would have been trampled over by pedestrians, if not for God’s care, that rescued him and took him back to the nest of faith, until he eventually develops wings, by which he can fly.

¹ See *St. Iren. Adv Haer. 3:17:3.*

² *In Heb. Hom. 10:2.*

³ *Serm. On N.T. Lessons, 1.*

St. Augustine sees that rain here refers to preaching, that transferred from the vineyard (the Jewish nation), to the Gentiles¹.

The prophet says, ***“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: 7)

God presented all possibilities to the congregation as a whole: to the Priests and the Levites, as well as to the common people; the rich, the poor; the learned, and the illiterate, for that vineyard to produce truth and justice. The “Truth” did come incarnated from the tribe of Judah, but they shed His blood; and in place of “justice,” there were their cries “crucify Him! Crucify Him.”

3. A DETAILED PARADE OF THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF ISRAEL

Having revealed His love for His vineyard and His great care for it, and how the vineyard denied itself the sweet spiritual fruit, and the joyful wine, to produce instead thorns, that were made into a crown for the head of the Lord Jesus Christ. God began to parade the most serious of transgressions by the people, and their wild fruits, that brought about bitter results, in place of enjoyment of God’s blessings and fellowship of His glories:

a. ***“Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land.”*** (Is. 5: 8) By that He means, that they preoccupied themselves with purchasing houses and lands, by all means, everyone selfishly not leaving anything for his brother, especially the poor and the needy. Only few people got to own houses and land to use the public, not according to the law, that ordered equal distribution of land (Numbers 33: 54); and, in the year of the Jubilee, *“everyone shall regain his possession”* (Leviticus 25). The land of Canaan is a free gift granted to the whole people, in order that all would live in prosperity, enjoy the milk and honey that the land produces; as if it is God’s possession, that He presents to them. But, with this sort of behavior they committed the sins of greed, pride, mutiny, and breaking of the Law. That is why blessings was taken away, and left its place to curse; houses turned desolate, because of death and captivity; in one second 185,000 were killed in war. Land stopped giving its normal crop: ten acres of vineyards produced only 27.5 kilograms of grapes, instead of 283. 5 kilograms; seeds produces an ephah (a tenth part of a homer Ezekiel 45: 11) which means that crop does not exceed one tenth of the seeds put in the land.

b. ***“Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them”*** (Is. 5: 11). If the first woe came upon

¹ In Ps. 77.

them because of their greed and oppression, the second was because of excess looseness. They used to get drunk in the early morning, instead of going to work, and stay as such till late at night; that is to say, they got drunk day and night, thus break the divine commandment: “*Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening*” (Psalm 104: 23). Their life deviated from spiritual joy, mixed with serious life and worship, to looseness and softness, using all instruments of music (Is. 5: 12); and preoccupying themselves with holding banquets to get excited and induced to commit evil, disregarding life of piety in the Lord. And as said by the prophet Amos: “*Who chant to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; Who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best anointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives; and those who recline at banquets shall be removed.*” (Amos 6: 5 -7)

- ❖ Behold how God also condemns luxury; He does not rebuke them for their greed, but for mere extravagance. You eat in excess, while Christ has only what is necessary. You eat an assortment of cakes, while Christ has nothing more than dry bread. You drink the wine of Thasian, and do not offer Christ a cold glass of water, through those who are thirsty. You sleep on an expensive bed, while He is trembling with cold.

St. John Chrysostom¹

Through acts of looseness, man loose his inner consciousness, shifting from the knowledge of truth, to live as a slave of ignorance, to feel inner hunger and thirst, and find nothing to fulfill him. The prophet says, “***Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge. Their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst***” (Is. 5: 13) Through looseness, man loses his inner conscience to descend into an abyss, that widely opens its gates to swallow with no limits. Thus man loses his glory and pomp (Is. 5: 14), and to get humbled (Is. 5: 15).

This is the bitter fruit got by those who walk through the wide gate that of continuous looseness to fulfill their worldly desires. Yet, what is far more serious would be their eternal punishment, as expressed by the prophet: “***Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself, and opened its mouth beyond measure. Their glory and their multitude and their pomp, and he who is jubilant, shall descend into it.***” (Is, 5: 14) He portrays Sheol, namely the abyss, as the earth opening itself up to swallow the wicked, as what happened with Korah and his group; opening up, to ask for more, swallowing them, that they may remain in the deep darkness forever.

This is what would happen to those preoccupied with life of luxury and fun. But as to God, “***The Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God who is Holy shall be hallowed in righteousness.***” (Is. 5: 16)

¹ In Matt. Hom. 48:8.

Some will probably wonder, what would be the situation of the small remnant that is honest to God? To that the prophet answers: **“Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture; and in the waste places of the fat ones, strangers shall eat.” (Is. 5: 17)** The little flock of lambs shall feed, wherever the good shepherd, the Lord Christ, leads it. He, who will snatch it away from oppression and persecution. These will feed in peace and safety, not to be disturbed by anyone. When the Church of the Old Testament was destructed an end through the Jews’ rejection of faith in the Lord Christ, the Gentiles (the foreigners) inherited the promises, the covenants, the law, and the prophecies etc.

c. **“Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity; and sin as if with a cart rope.” (Is. 5: 18)** This third woe would occur to the seekers of iniquity, with a great desire and zeal; who go to it with their own choice, push themselves toward it forcibly, or strongly pull it to themselves. Those would face danger, as they fall in the snare of vanity, and get themselves attached to the wheel of sin to be attached to it.

They draw sin as if by a rope, to find it so heavy, that it would fall over their heads crushing them.

Some Fathers of the Church believe that the wicked fall down from one sin to another, as though they make for themselves a long rope that would draw them to evil in servitude. Every fall would lead to another one and each declination causes a more dropping one. And instead of thinking of ascension, the wicked fall more and more.

- ❖ Truly, every man makes for himself a rope by his sins: **“Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity.” (Is. 5: 18 LXX)** Who makes for himself a long rope? It is he, who adds a sin to another. How? When he tries to cover a sin he committed by another sin¹.
- ❖ As the wicked threaten to kill the righteous, they bind themselves with shackles, with a strong coarse rope of their own doing².
- ❖ Blessed are those who, through work and character sing the praises of ascensions (grades), and woe to those who draw sin as a long rope (thus fall down with it)³.

St. Augustine

Beside the dangers attached to sin, it draws man to a chain of other sins, to turn him into something like a ball, played with by sins. The second danger is that it creates a spirit of ridicule and mock, in place of a desire to rid oneself of it. Thus the wicked say, **“Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it. And let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw**

¹ In John tr. 80:1.

² On Ps. 119.

³ On the Trinity, 11:6.

near and come, that we may know it.” (Is. 5: 19) They doubt the possibility of God’s judgment, assuming that they are capable of confronting it with proofs and excuses. Mockingly, they say, **“the Holy One of Israel,”** the title used by the prophets, on account of their hope in the coming of the Messiah, the Savior. It is as though they are completely rejecting that hope.

In every age, there are wicked people, who take God’s long, suffering lightly, and make fun of His promises and love, as well as of His chastisements; assuming that they are all, just words or fantasies, that would never be realized:

“Indeed they say to me: ‘where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now.’” (Jeremiah 17: 15)

“The days are prolonged, and every vision fails.” (Ezekiel 12: 22)

“Scoffers will come in the last days... 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: 3, 4)

d. **“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” (Is. 5: 20)** The fourth woe falls upon those who mix between truth and false, good and evil, light and darkness, sweetness and bitterness, knowledge and ignorance. They give sin a touch of virtue; justifying, for example, anger, as a defense of truth; or judging others under pretense of a desire for reform etc.

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that, that woe is a threat to the liars and the proud¹. God is the Truth, and the devil is the liar and father of liars. Whoever knows the will of God, knows the truth and walks in goodness; but whoever disregards the divine will, would exit the circle of truth, to live in lying; losing through this his ability to recognize the good and the light, and to comprehend the real knowledge of heaven and divinity.

e. Pretense of wisdom and prudence, disregarding views and counsel of others: **“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight.” (Is. 5: 21)**

❖ Whoever is preoccupied with his own self, and refrain from seeking the counsel of others, carries the mark of idiocy. It was said: *“Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him”* (Proverb 26: 12)².

St. John Chrysostom

f. The mighty who are corrupting their energies: **“Woe to men, mighty at drinking wine; woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink.” (Is. 5: 22)** When the leaderships get preoccupied with banquets, luxuries and drinking, they lose their real role. We often corrupt our

¹ Paed. 3:12.

² In Gal. Hom. 1.

energies by ourselves, through deviating from our serious goals, and plunging in the desires of this world.

g. **Receiving bribes: “Who justify the wicked for a bribe; and take away justice from the righteous man” (Is. 5: 23)**

4. A DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

Because of the transgressions of the people, the wrath of God flared, **“as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff.” (Is. 5: 24)** He allowed their chastisement so severely until the hills trembled, and their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the street. Here he is referring to what was going to happen to God’s people during the cruel Assyrian invasion.

However, in the midst of that fire, he says, **“His hand is stretched out still.” (Is. 5: 25)** He is still filled with love, waiting for man to come back to Him!

5. THE ASSYRIAN INVASION

The prophet is giving us a horrible description of the Assyrian army, in its invasion of God’s people, a description that reveals the severity, aggression and persistence of the invasion of the human soul by the devil. At the same time, he rebukes the loose believers. The wicked, for the sake of worldly benefit, would not linger, until they realize their goal; while the children of God, on the other hand, are not zealous enough to gain the fellowship of eternal glory.

a. **“No one will be weary...” (Is. 5: 27)** Despite the long distance they walk, and the difficulties they encounter, they do not get weary, because of their strong desire to enjoy the loot... while we, the believers, get careless in our spiritual strife, under the pretence that they are exhausted and feel weary.

b. **“...or stumble among them,” (Is. 5: 27)** despite the coarseness of the way; and probably because God has invited them to chastise His people, He made it easier for them. It was more fitting for us, not to fear the coarseness of the way; being in the hand of our Christ “the Way;” there is no chance for us to stumble.

c. **“No one will slumber or sleep,” (Is. 5: 27)** for the sake of that worldly and evil goal set before their eyes. Is it not more fitting for us to refrain from slumbering or sleeping, to stay in the alertness of the Spirit, until we realize our mission?

d. **“...nor will the belt on their loin be loosed; nor the straps of their sandals be broken.” (Is. 5: 27)** That is to say, serious and zealous. The Lord instructed us, **“Let your waists be girded” (Luke 12: 35)**, until we consummate God’s ministry with strength.

e. **“...whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent. Their horses’ hooves will seem like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind.” (Is. 5: 28)** Ready with their weapons and

equipment, to fight mightily, swiftly, and for an extended time, until they realize their goal. We should, as believers are as ready for our battle against the devil, with the spiritual weapons of faith, spoken of, more profusely by the apostle Paul (Ephesians 6).

f. ***“Their roaring will be like a lion, they will roar like young lions. Yes they will roar, and lay hold of the prey. They will carry it away safely, and no one will deliver.” (Is. 5: 29)*** They carry the image of their master, the devil, *“who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5: 8). It was fitting for believers to *stay “sober, vigilant, steadfast in faith”* (1 Peter 5: 8, 9) that is capable of destroying our adversary. The Lamb, Lord Jesus Christ, of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5: 5), has advanced, to spare us getting defeated by the devil, and to help us resisting him and destroying his capabilities.

g. ***“In that day they will roar against them, like the roaring of the sea.” (Is. 5: 30)*** The army will fall on them, the roaring of its soldiers like that of the sea, that cannot be resisted, it sweeps and swallows every thing before it. As if there would be no escape from Assyria.

h. Finally, the people will lose all hope, as, ***“If one looks to the land, behold, darkness and sorrow; and the light is darkened by the clouds.” (Is. 5: 30)*** In the times of affliction, they would raise their eyes to seek a way to salvation; but darkness would prevail over their thoughts, and clouds of fire smoke would devastate every hope they may still have. They rejected God, *“the true Light,”* to have darkness prevail over their depths. That is why the Psalmist cries out: *“In your light, O Lord, we see light.” (Psalm 36: 9).*

CHAPTER 6

THE VISION OF ISAIAH AND HIS CALL

The prophet records to us his well-famed vision; in which he saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filling the temple. He saw Him in His exalted glory praised by the Seraphim. He was then called for the holy ministry of prophecy.

Some may ask: Did the prophet enjoy that vision prior to his prophecies mentioned in the previous chapters, or it came afterwards? And why did he not start his book with it?

- 1. Vision of the prophet in the temple** **1-4.**
- 2. Consecrating Isaiah's mouth** **5-7.**
- 3. Mission of the prophet Isaiah** **8-13.**

1. VISION OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH IN THE TEMPLE

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.” (Is. 6: 1)

The prophet enjoyed that vision, in the year that King Uzziah died; probably after he proclaimed his previous prophecies that carried a warning to the people, who received them lightly and scornfully. Because of that he was granted that vision, to proclaim and confirm to the people that he is carrying a divine message, the word of God. He might have seen it prior to those prophecies, and proclaimed it later to confirm to the people, that he is not uttering on his own; the same way the apostle Paul did, when, in order to confirm his apostleship, he talked about the vision he saw at the beginning of his mission (2 Corinthians 12).

The vision was revealed in the year that King Uzziah died, who reigned on Judah when he was 16 years of age, for 52 years, during which he did what was good in the eyes of the Lord. He succeeded in every thing he did: in wars, as well as in building and establishing cities etc. Yet, as his name was raised high, he fell in the transgression of pride; and took on himself burning incense on the altar of incense. The Lord struck him with leprosy in the temple, to be thrust out by the priests, and to remain a leper until the day of his death, in an isolated house far from the king's palace.

Isaiah might have watched with joy Uzziah's achievements, together with his straight heart and growth in Spirit; but to get sad afterwards for his fall in his last days, and his tragic death, isolated from the people of God, thrust out of His holy temple; as an example of the vanity of worldly glory.

The prophet looked at his people, in the year that king Uzziah died, to see them scattered as sheep with no shepherd; especially that the king has been isolated for sometime before his death, because of his leprosy. Isaiah comprehended how the people were in great need of heavenly intervention, as the human arm was incapable of saving them. And as said by the Psalmist: *Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help; his spirit departs; he returns to his earth.*” (Psalm 146: 3, 4)

In the midst of this bitterness, the Lord granted Isaiah that vision to comfort him. It most probably took place in the temple, to which he retreated for a private worship. While he was pleading to God to take over the care for His people the Lord appeared to him, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, to confirm that He is the heavenly Shepherd; Whose thoughts and ways are higher than human thoughts and His ways than theirs. He was sitting high and lifted up, to carry with Him His Church to partake of His exalted glories. He saw the train of His robe filling the temple, as He is there, in His Church, waiting for every soul to come to enjoy union with Him. He saw the Lord Christ in His glory (see John 12: 41), filling the heaven and earth with His deity and His care.

St. John Chrysostom believes that Isaiah and other prophets did not actually see the essence of deity as it is, but God, out of love for His creation, reveals through putting Himself down as much as they can bear of a vision. Even as far as the heavenly hosts, and the carriers of His throne, each of them also sees of Him as much as he can bear; but, the divine essence itself, namely in its absolute perfection, is incomprehensible¹.

❖ The Seraphim cry out saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord of hosts;” the heavenly hosts in continuous apprehension, turn their faces, and stretch their wings like a wall, to protect themselves from the unbearable radiation that emerge from the Almighty. Nevertheless what they are seeing is not more than a miniature version of reality.

Despite the fact that even the Seraphim are unable to behold God, who appears to them but as a sort of lowering Himself according to their weakness, we see people who dare to imagine that particular nature, incomprehensible by the Seraphim. They arrogantly claim their ability to behold it clearly and with no limits! The heavens should tremble, and the earth should be shocked!²

❖ God, even to the heavenly hosts is incomprehensible and unapproachable. That is why, He lowers Himself to appear, and the way He did in the vision of Isaiah. God, who is unlimited and do not sit on a throne... out of love, appears, sitting on a throne, surrounded by the

¹ *In John hom., 15:1.*

² *In Isai. Hom. 2:2.*

heavenly hosts¹.

- ❖ These visions (the visions of the prophets) are announcements and are all examples of His condescending, and are not revelations of His essence uncovering Him. If they were to behold His essence, they would not behold it in so different forms. He is simple, with no form, body members, nor definite patterns. His nature does not sit, stand, or walk².

St. John Chrysostom

“Above it stood the Seraphim; each one had six wings; with two he covered his face; with two he covered his feet; and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory!’” (Is. 6: 2, 3)

What comforts the soul of a minister is to have his heart elevated to behold the angelic ministry; then he would realize that all troubles and weaknesses of the Church will one day come to an end, to share with the angels their praise eternally. The Church here - as an icon of heaven - is enjoying the pledge of the heavenly ministry. However in one of the Coptic homilies, the church is identified as a place of comfort, and the angels assemble where of the Cherubim and Seraphim stay³. It is said that **St. Pachomius** used to see the Church full of angels.

The Seraphim are the ministers of the divine throne; they carry the Lord with joy, and praise God incessantly. It is as though, the work of every minister or prophet in the Church, is to draw every soul towards the Lord, and to turn it into a throne of Him, to dwell and establish His kingdom in it; to resemble a fiery heavenly Seraph, each with six wings: With two he covers his face, a sign of his apprehension and inability to behold all divine glory; with two he covers his feet, a sign of shyness; and with two he rises up to heaven. It is fitting for us to liken the Seraphim: to enjoy apprehension of divinity, with shyness, together with continuous growth and continuous elevation towards the heavenlies.

As to the heavenly song of the Seraphim “*the Trisagion*,” it came in the writings of the **Origen**, and probably it was used earlier than that in Alexandria⁴. According to tradition of the Church, as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were preparing the body of the Lord Christ for burial, they heard that song said.

The Seraphim say, “***The whole earth is full of His glory.***” (Is. 6: 3) It does not only fill the heavens, but also the whole earth. It is dwelling on the earth, to turn it into heaven. And as said by **St. Clement of Alexandria**, the earth becomes a heaven for the true believer. If our body is originally of dust, then the Word of God received our human nature to sanctify it, thus our

¹ للمؤلف: للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم ، 1988 ، ص 299.

² للمؤلف: للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم ، 1988 ، ص 302.

³ The author: Church, House of God, 1982, p. 333.

⁴ Gregory Dix: The Shape of the Liturgy, p. 237.

body is glorified in Him. We should not underestimate it, as it shares with the soul its worship, strife, and crown.

In this song, the following are to be noticed:

a. The word “*Lord*,” came in pleural (*Adonai*), and not in singular (*Adon*). Probably for this, and because of the repetition of the word “Holy” three times, **St. Gregory of Nyssa**¹ believes that the angels are proclaiming the glory of the Trinity; while the apostle Paul, refers it to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28: 25, 26); St. John refers it to the Son (John 12: 41) while the old Jewish tradition, refers it to the Father.

❖ Through the Seraphim, the mystery of the Trinity was clearly proclaimed, as they uttered that amazing cry “Holy,” bearing beauty and splendor to each Person of the Trinity².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

b. God was named, “*The Lord of hosts*,” which is His title in His battle against evil and the forces of darkness that has an instructive significance³. It did not come in the books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, Job, proverbs, and Ecclesiastes; but came sporadically in Samuel, Kings, Chronicles and Psalms; and profusely in the Prophets 80 times in Jeremiah, 14 in Haggai, 50 in Zechariah, and more than 24 times in Malachi. The first to use that title was Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in her prayer of victory she uttered, as she felt that God was the source of her victory, in her inner battle.

c. This song is used in the holy Liturgy of the Eucharist as a sign of fellowship between believers and heavenly hosts in worship, on a heavenly level, with the spirit of union and joint harmony.

❖ I wish we gather together with our conscience and in union, and cry out to Him, zealously, and as though with one mouth, in order to partake of His great glorious promises⁴.

St. Clement of Rome

❖ You should comprehend, the extent of fear, by which the Seraphim are uttering and praising that name; while you, in your prayers and appeals, utter it with great lack of due respect; although you should be filled with apprehension, and be in a state of vigil and dignity⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The new things go in harmony with the old. Here, the Seraphim are crying out, one to the

¹ *Greg. Nyssa: Adv. Eunomius 2:14.*

² *Ibid 1:23.*

³ *Bultema, p. 93.*

⁴ *Ep. 1:34.*

⁵ *Conc. The Statues, hom. 7:9.*

other, “*Holy, holy, holy. The Lord of host;*” the two Testaments are walking in harmony, and with one voice¹.

St. Augustine

“*And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of Him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.*” (Is. 6: 4)

The posts of God’s house were shaken before the cries of the Seraphim glorifying the Holy God, and the house was filled with dense smoke, a sign that the glory of God came to it. When the Lord Christ entered Jerusalem, “*all the city was moved.*” (Matthew 21:10) We are in need of God, to proclaim His dwelling in us, to establish His kingdom, so as to share with the Seraphim their eternal praise, and to have the depths of our souls shaken, together with the prophet Isaiah. Also the glory of Lord may be declared within us, and our depth sanctified thus we are counted as witnesses of the truth to His Gospel.

2. CONSECRATING ISAIAH’S MOUTH

As we stand in the presence of the Holy God; proclaiming to us His glory; while we discover our uncleanness, as happened with the prophet Isaiah, thus we say, “***Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.***” (Is. 6: 5)

The apostle Paul confesses that he is the “*chief sinner*” (1 Timothy 1: 15); not because he was thinking of his sins, trying to count them; but that came as a fruit of his being enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God, that exposes our depths, to discover that we are nothing before the glory of God, and that we are totally sinners before His holiness. That’s why Abraham, the Patriarch, as he began to talk to God, said: “*Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes, have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord*” (Genesis 18: 27)

Isaiah might have wished to share with the Seraphim their praising of the Lord; thus he realized that he was a man of unclean lips; and as he looked at the hosts of Seraphim in their joy, he also realized that he was living in the midst of people of unclean lips.

❖ With daily moans, the saints feel sad for the weakness of their nature; and while they try to change their thoughts, will, and inner conscience, they cry out pleading to God, “do not enter with your slave into trial, as no one alive would be justified before You.” Thus, they realize the weakness of the righteousness of man, and its lack of perfection together with his continuous need of the mercies of God. That is why, that man, whose iniquity is taken away by means of the firebrand of His “Living Word” on the altar, after his amazing vision of God and the exalted Seraphim, and his enjoyment of the proclamation of divine mysteries; that

¹ On Ps. 50.

man says, “*Woe is me... because I am a man of unclean lips, living in the midst of people of unclean lips.*”¹

- ❖ As you can see, how all saints truly confess, not on behalf of the people, but on their own behalf, that they are sinners. Yet, they never despair for their salvation. They are always looking forward to complete justification, with the grace and mercy of God².

Abbot Theonas

His awareness of the uncleanness of his lips and those of his people did not destroy his soul, but, on the contrary, filled him with hope in God, whom he saw, as “*the Lord of hosts,*” who is capable of setting from humanity spiritual hosts for Himself. That has been realized for him, as he said: “*Then one of the Seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a firebrand which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity has been taken away, and your sin purged’*”(Is. 6: 6, 7)

In the fraction of the **Liturgy of St. Cyril**, it is said: [As You sanctified the lips of your minister and prophet Isaiah; when one of the Seraphim took a firebrand from the altar, with a tong, and touched his lips,” *This has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away;*” so also, we, the weak and sinful slaves, who request your mercy; we beseech You to sanctify our souls, bodies, and hearts. Grant us that true Firebrand, the Life-giving one to the soul, body and spirit - that is the Holy body and sacred blood, of Your Christ.]

And in another prayer of fraction, the priest says, [Because I dared to touch Your body and blood, out of my yearning for your love, do not burn me with them, O my Creator; but burn rather all the thorns that is strangling my soul.]

The holy Virgin Mary carried in her womb the Word of God, incarnated in her - the Firebrand, that sanctifies humanity with His honored blood.

3. MISSION OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH

As the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, the train of His robe filling the temple, surrounded by the Seraphim, and his lips were sanctified by the divine firebrand, he yearned for the heavenly life and the angelic praise. But, at the same time, he also longed to see his people, enjoying that exalted life; as though he is saying with the apostle Paul: “*I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.*” (Philippians 1: 23, 24) That is what the prophet Isaiah also proclaims saying, “*Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’*” (Is. 6: 8)

¹ St. Cassian: Conf. 23:17.

² Ibid.

This is the fifth scene of that same vision, in which he was called for prophetic work, for the sake of the Kingdom of God. **These scenes are:**

1. The Lord God in His glory (Is. 6: 1).
2. The Seraphim praising Him (Is. 6: 2, 3).
3. The posts of the door shaken, and the house filled with smoke (Is. 6: 4).
4. Sanctification of the lips of the prophet (Is. 6: 5 - 7).
5. Calling Isaiah by the voice of God Himself (Is. 6: 8).

The call came from God the Almighty Himself; And as Isaiah believed in the salvation ability and the sanctifying work of God, he came forward to take over himself that task, having faith that, although he was weak, yet he was strong by God. When we realize that we are nothing, we should believe in God the Almighty, who is capable, by His Holy Spirit, of working through us.

Here, we should remark, that although the Speaker is singular: “*Whom shall I send?*” we find Him using the plural pronoun: “*Who will go for us?*” That is a confirmation that He is the One God in a Trinity; namely, of three Persons.

God, the Holy Trinity accepted Isaiah’s offer, and said to him: “*Go.*” (Is. 6: 9) God sent Isaiah, not for the sake of gaining dignity or glory, but to get him into bitterness with a people who reject the Truth. Ministry, is not Church positions or dignities, but spiritual strife, for washing the feet of others, and for provoking them to receive the truth; through the holy altar, that sanctifies the inner lips, and grants the active Word of God in the life of both ministers and the ministered.

God put His words in the prophet’s mouth: “*Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.*” (Is. 6: 9) God put in Isaiah’s mouth numerous prophecies concerning the Lord Christ and His redemptive work, that were realized when the Lord Christ came. They heard and saw, yet they did not believe in Him, because their inner insight was blinded, in contradiction to the apostles, to whom the Lord said: “*Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.*” (Matthew 13: 16)

St. John Chrysostom says about these people: [They saw how He cast out demons, only to say, ‘He has Satan’; and saw those risen from the dead; yet, instead of prostrating to Him, they plotted to kill Him.]

I have already presented a study of that prophecy, in our interpretation of the gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 13. So here, I shall mention a comment by **St. Augustine** on the question: Why would we blame the Jews for their disbelief, when God has blinded their eyes?

[They could not believe, because Isaiah so prophesied, as God told him what their situation would be. But, if you ask: what was the reason of their disbelief, I will instantly answer: They did not want to. As God foresaw their corrupted will, He so foretold His prophet, as the

future is not hidden from Him... God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, as He forsook them, and denied them His care¹.]

St. Irenaeus answers the same question, saying, [They become blinded because of their disbelief in God. They look at Him, yet do not see Him; as to them, He is, as though, not there; as the case is with the sun - His creation - which blinds those with weak vision; to be unable to see its light. As to those who believe in Him and follow Him, He grants greater enlightenment to their minds².]

That is the interpretation of the words of the prophet: ***“Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.”***(Is. 6: 10) It is to be noticed here, that God does not attribute the people to Him, but call them in His anger: “this people.” He counts them unworthy of being attributed to Him, because of the dullness of their hearts, the heaviness of their ears, and the blindness of their eyes; that is to say, because of their violence, rebellion, and spiritual ignorance.

This prophecy refers to the denial of the Jews of the Lord Christ when He came, as well as to the denial of the prophecies in the days of Isaiah, to fall in captivity, and to be destroyed by Sennacherib the Assyrian.

Isaiah got grieved, as he realized the heavy burden of responsibility to fall on his shoulders, and the troubles and pains waiting for him; as he as he realized the extent of destruction anticipated for the people, when, ***“Cities are laid waste and without inhabitants; the houses are without a man; the land is utterly desolate,”*** (Is. 6: 11) so he cried out saying, ***“Lord how long?”*** (Is. 6: 11) Was he asking: How long will the people remain in that misery? or How long shall I be proclaiming such bitter and harsh prophecies?!

The Lord revealed to him how the situation of the people would be, after their defeat before the Assyrians, proclaiming that ***“yet a tenth will be in it, and will return...”*** (Is. 6: 13); from which He will set a ***“holy seed;”*** thus prophesying about the captivity and what would follow it. At the same time, that is to be looked at, as a prophecy of the captivity of the Jews, in their denial of faith in the Lord Christ the Savior of the world, and that, by the end of time, a remnant would remain to return to faith in Him. The apostle Paul says, ***“Hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved.”*** (Romans 11: 25, 26)

¹ , In John tr. 53:6.

² Adv. Haer. 3:19:1.

CHAPTER 7

SALVATION OF KING AHAZ AND THE MESSIANIC SALVATION

In order to understand what came in this chapter, we have to get back to what was written in (2 Kings 16), that dealt with Ahaz, as the most evil among the kings of Judah, known for his hypocrisy and cowardice; passing his son through the fire, and sacrificing and burning incense to the idols on the high places, and under every green tree.

At the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, Aram (Syria) made a pact with the kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) against Judah, and attacked it. Pekah the king of Israel killed 120 thousands in one day; while Rezin the king of Syria captured many. Both of them wished to take over Jerusalem, but God kept it. Despite Ahaz's corruption, he was assured through the prophet Isaiah, who proclaimed God's care for the salvation of His people and His city.

Isaiah proceeded from this worldly salvation, to talk about eternal salvation, that is to be realized by Immanuel, the Messiah.

1. A pact between Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel against Ahaz

- 1.**
- 2. Ahaz got frightened** **2.**
- 3. Isaiah assures Ahaz** **3-9.**
- 4. Ahaz refrains from asking for a sign** **10-13.**
- 5. The divine sign: Immanuel** **14-16.**
- 6. Assyria, the ally, turns into an enemy** **17-25.**

1. A PACT BETWEEN REZIN, KING OF SYRIA, AND PEKAH, KING OF ISRAEL AGAINST AHAZ

At the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, Rezin king of Aram (Syria), joined forces with Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, against Judah (Is. 7: 1). The former attacked from the east of Jordan, while the later invaded it with his armies from the north. After defeating Ahaz, they ascended to Jerusalem, the capital, to surround it, but failed. The reason for that battle was a political difference between Ahaz and the two kings: Ahaz preferred to join forces with Assyria, while the two kings joined forces with Egypt.

When Ahaz found himself in a tight corner, he sought the help of Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, who went up against Damascus and killed Rezin (2 Kings 16: 9); and did the same to

Samaria (2 kings 15: 29).

2. AHAZ GOT FRIGHTENED

When Ahaz knew that Aram came to Ephraim (the northern kingdom or Israel) to join forces against him, ***“His heart and the heart of his people moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.”*** (Is. 7: 2) They knew that they are unable to confront both Aram and Israel. But the real reason for their fear, was their disbelief in God, who could have supported them and gave them victory. They lost their inner peace, through their isolation from God, source of conquest and peace.

3. ISAIAH ASSURES AHAZ

Ahaz got terribly confused, as he failed to take into account the factor of faith, that is “God’s presence;” he did not call for repentance and return to God; he did not go to the temple to place the problem before God; he did not send for the prophet Isaiah to seek his counsel; but he sought instead, human resources, from restoring to Assyria for protection, to heeding to the end of the aqueduct (Is. 7: 3) west of Jerusalem, together with the elite of his kingdom, to make a reservoir for the water of the old pool, to benefit the city during the anticipated siege, and to deny the enemy its use (2 Chronicles 22; and Isaiah 22: 9-11); beside strengthening the walls of the city as much as possible.

Despite all that, God intervened, not for Ahaz’s sake, but for that of the small holy remnant of His people, of David his servant, as well as of His beloved city. He dispatched Isaiah, to go with his son Shear-Jashub [= the remnant will return], to confirm to Ahaz: ***“Take heed and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and the son of Remaliah.”*** (Is. 7: 4)

The prophet and his son met the king at the aqueduct, to proclaim God’s decision that the salvation would not be realized through human planning and worldly possibilities, but through the exalted work of God and His care for His children. The prophet confronted the king to confirm to him that God desires to talk to humanity, wherever they might be; to meet with Levi at his tax office; with Zacchaeus on the sycamore tree; and with the Samaritan woman near the well of Jacob etc. He seeks us wherever we are, yearning to our salvation, much more so than our own yearning to Him.

God told Ahaz not to fear or be faint-hearted, on the following grounds:

a. The two enemies, Pekah and Rezin, are nothing but two stubs of smoking firebrands (Is. 7: 4). The children of God may encounter oppression, and enemy pacts against them; yet, that would be just a smoking firebrand to pollute the air and hurt the nose for a limited time; but without fire to burn. The enemy might be strong and mighty in appearance; yet, he gets weakened

and down to size before us, if we hide in Christ the conqueror of Satan and all his hosts.

St. John Chrysostom says to the fallen Theodore: [If the devil has got that ability to knock you down from your exalted virtue to such great limits of evil; so how much more would be God's ability to restore you to your previous confidence? He would not only get you back to what you used to be, but to a far better status¹.]

b. Failure of the enemies' plot: The two kings secretly carried out a hidden devilish plot; Yet, God, who is aware of all mysteries, exposed it, to the benefit of king Ahaz, despite his wickedness and idiocy. God says to him: ***"It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass."*** (Is. 7: 7) The enemy may succeed at the beginning, assuming that he has fulfilled his evil goals. But God *"scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts."* (Luke 1: 51)

c. Aram will not be able to stretch his kingdom as he thought, but he should keep: ***"For the head of Syria is Damascus; and the head of Damascus is Rezin."*** (Is. 7: 8) So however long he fights Rezin, he would eventually return to Damascus, and would never stretch his kingdom at the expense of Judah, as he planned. As to Ephraim, ***"within sixty-five years, Ephraim will be broken; so that it will not be a people."***(Is. 7: 8) Some people see that it is in the period of 5, and 6 years that is years; as the captivity of Israel had been realized after 11 years of Isaiah's prophecy (2 kings 17: 3, 6). Yet other scholars believe that the prophet here, is referring to the destruction of Israel on the hands of Esarhaddon, who brought people over from Babylon Cuthah, Ava, Hammath, and from Sepharvaim, to the cities of Samaria, to replace the children of Israel, in order to destroy the kingdom of Israel completely (2 kings 17: 24).

The prophet ended his talk by saying, ***"If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established."*** (Is. 7: 9) In another version, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all." If they do not believe in the divine promise, and have complete trust in the arm of God, they will not be capable of sustaining those difficult times. Faith is the *"breastplate"* (1 Thessalonians 5: 8) that protects us against the strikes of the enemy.

In the Septuagint version this phrase came as: ***"If you do not believe, you will not understand;"*** to be commented on profusely by **St. Augustine**. Of his sayings:

[You will not be granted prudence, unless faith shines in your heart².]

[Faith is to be sought, but prudence exists, as the prophet says, "If you do not believe, you will not understand³.]

[According to teachings of the Church, it is fitting for the mind, first to adopt simple faith,

¹ للمؤلف: ستعود بقوة أعظم، للقديس يوحنا ذهبي الفم ص 5.

² On the Trinity, 7:6:12.

³ Ibid 15:2.

to be able to understand the eternal heavenly issues¹.]

[You (the heretics), have not been taught in the kingdom of heaven - that is to say, the true Church of Christ - or else you would have quenched your thirst from the fountain of the Holy Scripture, Old and New. God, Himself says, “*Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven, is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.*” (Matthew 13: 52)²]

St. Augustine³ believes that, with faith, man would be accompanied by Lord Christ to talk with him all along the way, as He did with the two disciples of Emmaus who begged Him to abide with them; and when He did, “*their eyes were opened, and they knew Him.*” (Luke 24: 31)

St. Clement of Alexandria comments on that same phrase, saying, [That means that if you do not believe in what have been prophesied by the Law, and receive the teachings of the Law, you would not understand the Old Testament, interpreted by the Lord Christ, through His coming⁴.]

4. AHAZ ABSTAINS FROM ASKING FOR A SIGN

God granted Ahaz all possibilities of salvation; yet, his heart was utterly hardened, and he put his trust in Assyria, and not in God. Despite that, God, with His love and compassion, kept addressing him through the prophet Isaiah, saying, “*Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God. Ask it either in the depth or in the height above.*” (Is. 7: 11) As though He is saying to him: why should you seek the help of Assyria, a foreigner? I am your God, ready to confirm My covenants to you, through a sign from earth or from heaven; I am the God of heaven and earth. Ask for whatever you want, and it will be given you. Ask for an earthquake, or a break in the earth, as what happened with Korah and his company; or ask for lightnings or thunders or rains or a sign in the sun, as what happened with Joshua when the sun stood still. Although I do not like giving signs for show, yet, for the sake of My love for the house of David; and in order that you would believe in Me, I am ready to grant you your heart desires. However, Ahaz disregarded God, and sought the help of Assyria; that is why he abstained from asking for a divine sign, giving as an excuse a quotation of the biblical text, saying, “*I will not test the Lord*” (Is. 7: 12; Deuteronomy 6: 16). He did not say that out of trust in God, but because he did not want to deal with Him.

This chapter is read in the first hour of Good Friday, and on the second week of Great Lent, when readings concentrate on the temptation of the Lord Christ. As though the Spirit of the Lord is confirming that, in all ages, there are evildoers, who try to cover their evil by texts from

¹ *Reply to Faustus and Manichacan, 12:46.*

² *Ibid 4:2.*

³ *Sermons on the N.T. Lessons, 39:4.*

⁴ *Stromata 4:21.*

the Scripture. Even Satan himself, during his conversation with the Lord Christ, as he tempted Him on the mount, used this trend. How dangerous is the abuse of the word of God!

Ahaz was deceiving in his answer even to the Lord; that is why the prophet rebuked him saying, “*Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary My God also?*” (Is. 7: 13) People were wearied by the oppressions of Ahaz and his household, who are now wearing God, by their disbelief, and their leaning on Assyria instead of God.

5. THE DIVINE SIGN: IMMANUEL

Ahaz abstained from asking for a sign from God, to assure him that He is going to save him from Aram and Israel. And here is God, offering Himself as a sign, not to Ahaz, but to humanity as a whole, in assurance that He is saving it, not from human arm, but from the evil forces of darkness, to raise it above worldly events, and to carry it with Him to the Fatherly bosoms. And at the same time, to assure Ahaz, that the house of David will not utterly fall. But the Son of David “the Amazing Sign,” Who is capable of raising the fallen tent of David, is coming.

The sign, that God desires to offer to every believer, is that He is giving Himself “*Immanuel.*” We are not “*asking in the depth, or in the height above;*” but, like Ahaz, we are abstaining from asking, although He is offering Himself to us, descending to lift us up to Him, to be our good share, not to be taken away from us. That is why **St. Irenaeus** says, [What Isaiah said, “*Ask in the depth, or in the height above,*” is a reference to Him, who “*descended, and ascended...*” (Ephesians 4: 10)¹.] Let us ask for that amazing sign, “*Immanuel*” who descends to lift us up to His heavens.

It is a unique sign and as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [As what was going to happen, was an amazing thing, difficult to believe, even when it is realized, that is why, He sent, beforehand, prophets to proclaim that fact².] **St. Justin** says, [Things that appeared unreasonable and impossible to humans God proclaimed through the spirit of prophecy³.]

a. “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*” (Is. 7: 14) And as **St. Justin** says, in his dialogue with Trypho: [It is obvious for all, that no one of Abraham’s race has been born, or said to be born, by a virgin, except our Christ.]

The virginity of St. Mary is a biblical fact, included in our faith in Christ Jesus - her Son. The Word of God, in His incarnation, did not care for His place of birth, the clothes to be wrapped in, nor the food to be fed; but was particulate in designating the “*virgin*” who is going to

¹ *Adv. Haer. 3:21:6.*

² *Against Marcionists and Manichaeans 3.*

³ *Apology 1:33.*

become His mother¹.

The Hebrew word for a virgin is “*alma*,” that refers to a young virgin, who could be betrothed; while “*isa*,” could be a married woman. The word “*alma*” conforms perfectly with the status of St. Mary as a virgin, who is, at the same time, betrothed to St. Joseph, who has been to her, a protector, as well as an honest witness of her virginity. Through his presence, all doubts concerning her are taken away.

The prophet Ezekiel said concerning the virginity of St. Mary: “*The Lord said to me: ‘this gate (of the sanctuary which faces toward the east) shall be shut; It shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.’*” (Ezekiel 44: 1.2)

The virginity of St. Mary is an evidence of our faith in the Lord Christ that He was not begotten through human seed. He is not from this world, but He is the incarnate Son of God, who came to us from up high. She conceived “*Immanuel*,” whose name means “*God is with us*.” He descended to us in the virgin womb, to carry our nature, to become one with us, and to dwell in our midst, sanctifying all what we have.

- ❖ Those who proclaimed that He is Immanuel, born from a virgin (Is. 7: 14), also proclaimed the union of God with the product of His hands. As the Logos became flesh; and the Son of God became a Son of Man; He gave, to humanity, through the purity of the womb, a renewal in God².

St. Irenaeus

- ❖ The Lord Christ opened the source of the holy Church, that silent source, the blameless, full of fruits, where the people of God are born³.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ Your divine birth, O Lord, has given all humanity a birth... Humanity begot You according to the flesh, and You begot it according to the Spirit... Glory to You, who became a child, to make every thing new⁴.

St. Ephram, the Syrian

- ❖ We confirm that the “*Only-Begotten Son*” became man... so that as He is begotten from a woman, according to the flesh, He would reclaim the human race anew in Him⁵.

St. Cyril the Great

¹ J.B. Carol: *Mariology*, 1955, vol. 1, p. 51. Cf. Fr. T. Malaty: *St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept*, ch. 1.

² *Adv. Haer.* 4:33:12.

³ *Comm. on Luke*, 2:57.

⁴ *Hymn 3 on Nativity*.

⁵ *PG*. 76:15-18.

b. ***“Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.” (Is. 7: 15)***

Here the prophet confirms the humanity of the Lord Christ. Although He is not of man’s seed, yet He became truly a Son of Man, likening us in every aspect except in sin alone.

Curds and honey are the food of little babes; He would not get to manhood all of a sudden, but would pass through adolescent stage, through which He would know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, a sign of maturity of His soul and mind. We beheld Him at the age of twelve sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were astonished at His understanding and answers (Luke 2: 46, 47).

That was realized concerning the Lord Christ, the only one begotten from a virgin. But as to what happened in the days of Ahaz, God proclaimed the birth of a son to Isaiah, of whom is said: ***“Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.”*** (Is. 7: 16) That had been accurately realized, as the king of Assyria invaded Damascus, a short time after the proclamation of this prophecy, and killed Rezin its king (2 Kings 16: 9); Likewise, Hoshea the son of Elah killed Pekah the son of Remaliah, and reigned in his place (2 Kings 15: 30); and 200,000 captives were promptly returned home [Shear-Jashub = the remnant will return], not through human ability, but by the Spirit of God (2 Chronicles 28: 8 - 15).

6. ASSYRIA, THE ALLY, TURNS INTO AN ENEMY:

As Ahaz leaned on Assyria as his ally, without the counsel of the Lord, God allowed it, that Assyria turned into an enemy against Judah. Judah passed through bitterness, it did not experience since the kingdom was divided into two kingdoms (Israel and Judah) (Is. 7: 17). At the same time Judah faced difficult times on the hands of Egypt. The two countries, Egypt and Assyria did not actually make a pact against Judah; yet the two of them fought one another, to turn Judah into a scapegoat; on whose land battles took place.

“It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord will whistle for the fly that is in the farthest part of the rivers of Egypt; and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. They will come, and all of them will rest in the desolate valleys, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all thorns, and in all pastures (that is to say the armies will be all over Judah).” (Is. 7: 18, 19)

God described the extent of devastation done by Assyria, likening it to shaving with a hired razor, the hair of the head, the legs and the beard (Is. 7: 20). As though the enemy, would use a razor to wipe away all what belongs to the king, to his household, and to the statesmen (the head), to the common people (the legs), and to the priests (the beard). Shaving the beard was a sign of humiliation; the captives were so committed against their own will.

Moreover, another portrait was introduced, of the devastation of Judah, which has been known for its rich wealth of sheep, everyone used to own numerous heads. Yet, after these

circumstances, *“It shall be in that day, that a man will keep alive, a young cow and two sheep.”* (Is. 7: 21) And, It shall happen in that day, that vines will turn into briars and thorns (Is. 7: 22), because of lack of working hands as a result of war.

CHAPTER 8

MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ

In the previous chapter, God spoke to king Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah, who proclaimed God's intervention to rescue Jerusalem from Aram and Israel. The prophet got his first son Shear-Jashub (= the remnant will return), to confirm the prompt return of the captives of Judah. And now, God speaks of the same thing, and under the same circumstances; and the prophet gets his second son, given the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (= Hasten to loot) to confirm that Assyria is soon coming to loot Aram and Israel, sparing Jerusalem. At the same time, he is warning the people of Judah because of their leaning on Assyria, and not on the Lord.

1. Assyria's conquest of Aram and Israel 1-4.
2. A warning to the children of Judah 5-8.
3. The land of Immanuel 9-10.
4. Doubting and stumbling in Immanuel 11-15.
5. The holy remnant 16-18.
6. Seeking the counsel of mediums and wizards 19-22.

1. ASSYRIA OVERCOMES ARAM AND ISRAEL

In the previous chapter, God talked to Ahaz, who was trembling because of Aram and Israel. Now He talks to the people, to confirm the destruction of the two kingdoms that joined forces against Judah. By a divine instruction, Isaiah took a large scroll, and wrote on it with a man's pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which means, "Hasten to loot." Isaiah put the scroll in a prominent place in the temple to be seen by everyone. Two priests witnessed it: Uriah and Zechariah. Uriah was the high priest in the days of Ahaz, his spiritual consultant, and shared with him the pagan worship. The two of them built an altar, according to the pattern of a Syrian one seen by the king in Damascus, for the king to make offerings on it (2 kings 16: 10 -16).

The two priests put their seal on the scroll as witnesses; as "*By the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established*" (2 Corinthians 13: 1); to certify that what Isaiah wrote was before that thing happened.

Isaiah proclaimed that before his child Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz shall reach the first year of age, the prophecy concerning Aram and Israel will be realized, saying, "***Before the child will have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the King of Assyria***" (Is. 8: 4) That was realized through Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria (2 kings 15: 29; 16: 9; 1 Chronicles 5: 26).

2. A WARNING TO THE CHILDREN OF JUDAH

After God proclaimed His salvation of Jerusalem, destroying Aram and Israel, who joined forces against it, He began to display the sins of the children of Judah, and how He will chastise them. Although He is defending them, yet, He is not defending their transgressions, but is demanding repentance.

He says, *“These people refused the waters of Shiloah that flow softly, and rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah’s son.”* (Is. 8: 6) ‘Shiloah’ is an aqueduct; its name means “the messenger,” known in the New Testament, by the name “Sloam.” This aqueduct has been dug in the rocks, along several thousands of feet, to the southwest of Jerusalem. Water used to flow in it softly, to fulfill the need of the city; and has been regarded as a symbol of the house of David¹. What does it mean, that the people refused the waters of that aqueduct? By comparing it to the rivers Abanah and Pharpar of Damascus they despised their own. That referred to their despite for what God granted them, ‘the kingdom of Judah,’ to seek what is others ‘the human arms.’ They lost their faith in God, Grantor of victory, and feared Rezin and the son of Remaliah, the foreigners, and opponents of Judah, seeking who would deliver them from their enemies.

The waters of Shiloah refer to the strength of the soft and quiet spirit, the source of sanctification and fountain of righteousness. Shiloah also means “the messenger,” which refers to the Lord Christ, sent by the Father for our salvation, to be rejected by the Jews, who refused the work of His Holy Spirit.

They refused the soft waters, seeking the strong mighty waters; that is why God chastised them through: *“(Bringing) up over them the waters of the river, strong and mighty... the king of Assyria and all his glory.”* (Is. 8: 7) If Judah is leaning on Assyria, it will come to save it, to turn, later on, into a torrent, like the Euphrates they admired and desired, that will go up over all his channels, and go over all his banks (Is. 8: 7). The Assyrian Tiglat-Pileser came to the rescue of Judah; But the Assyrian Sennacherib overwhelmed Judah, reaching the neck, and surrounded the head, Jerusalem, that would have fallen, if it was not for God’s intervention: *“He will pass through Judah, He will overflow and pass over, He will reach up to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of your land, O, Immanuel.”* (Is. 8: 8)

Thus God allows for chastisement, for temptations to come as a sweeping flood, to reach up to our necks. Yet, He keeps the head “our faith” in the Lord Christ our head, over the flood of temptations, so that our faith would not fail (Luke 22: 32), because we are the land of Immanuel, the possession of the Lord.

St. Augustine comments on the words of the Lord Christ: *“Be wise as serpents”* (Matthew 10: 16), saying that we should liken the wisdom of the serpent, that hides its head within the coils of its body, when it faces danger; blows would then fall on the body, and not on

¹ Bultema, p. 112.

the head; as it known that it would not perish as long as its head is sound and safe. So, it is fitting for us to keep our faith in the Lord Christ - our head - sound, whatever afflictions we encounter, so as not to perish.

Whatever the devil will do, to stretch out his wings within us (Is. 8: 8), no harm would come to us, as long as all our land is the land of Immanuel, namely, as long as our life is hidden beneath the wings of God; as long as we carry inside us the kingdom of Christ!

3. THE LAND OF IMMANUEL

While the prophet speaks of the current things in his days, God raises his mind, and the minds of believers toward the work of salvation of Christ. God, in His love, has compassion on the people of Judah, to save them from the aggression of Aram and Israel against them. Yet, as the people sin, by resorting to Assyria, the later turns into an oppressor against them. God allowed that to happen; but He did not allow for the complete obliteration of Judah, as from it the Lord Christ will come, the lion emerging from the tribe of Judah. He allowed for the Assyrian invasion, to flood and reach up to Judah's neck, yet He spared the head; as the Word of God will incarnate from the tribe of Judah, from St. Mary, to dwell among us, as Immanuel, who makes of our hearts a land and kingdom for Himself. That was why the prophet moved all of a sudden, from the problem of Judah, in his days, or a little later, to talk of the forces allied against Immanuel, saying,

“Be shattered, O you people, and be broken in pieces! Give ear, all you from far countries. Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces... Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak the word, but it will not stand, for God is with us.” (Is. 8: 9, 10)

It did not stop at Assyria that was devastated by 185,000 men killed in the battle, but the prophet proclaims the fall of all forces in the world, that oppose the truth: Assyria, to be followed by Babylon, then Persia and Medes, and the Roman empire (Is. 54: 17). The prophet is referring likewise to the spiritual forces of darkness, oppressive to the kingdom of Christ, proclaiming that enemies, joining forces and evil counsels against the Church, is something, actually addressed against Immanuel, who dwells in its midst. That is why the forces of darkness fall, and the true Church will overcome.

This prophetic voice cries out against the oppressors of Christ, proclaiming what the Lord Christ Himself said to Saul: *“Why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”* (Acts 9: 4, 5) Let the enemy do whatever is in his power, oppressing the believers; he is actually destroying himself.

4. DOUBTING AND STUMBLING IN IMMANUEL

It seems that some people did not believe the words of the prophet, assuming them to be a sort of political insurrection, or national treason against the king and authorities, aiming to stop

Judah from resorting to Assyria, that would lead to its destruction by the Syrians and Israel. But God, held Isaiah's hand to strengthen him (Is. 8: 11). Some believe that Isaiah himself - as a human - tended sometimes to adopt the views of the king, his aides, and the people. But God was persistent on showing him the way, even if it is contrary to what is generally believed, as though He held his hand to take him along the rejected narrow way. He might have held his hand to strengthen him, and to keep him from abandoning his prophetic work, under pressure of the vain accusations directed against him. It is as though God held Isaiah's hand to let him, in turn, hold the hands of the loyal, to put them in the hands of the Holy God. So he says, ***“Do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow. Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.”*** (Is. 8: 12, 13) Every honest soul in the ministry of the Lord will be persecuted. Yet God, Himself, will support it, not only to labor, but also to let it support others and encourage them to labor, with the Holy Spirit of God.

How marvelous are these words: ***“Do not be afraid... The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow. Let Him be your fear.”*** The evil forces have come together, arrogantly and haughtily joined forces. The children of God, on the other hand, unite in love, led by God the Holy Lord of hosts. These do not lean on human arms, and do not seek union between light and darkness, but believe in conquest and victory, through sanctification, or fellowship with the Holy God.

It is not Isaiah alone, or also the honest believers, who are persecuted, Immanuel Himself is persecuted and a ***“stone of stumbling”*** to many: ***“He will be a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble. They shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.”*** (Is. 8: 14, 15)

He is a ***“Sanctuary”*** or a ***‘Holy Stone,’*** for believers who resort to Him for protection and salvation. He is a ***“Foundation Stone”*** and a ***“Corner Stone”*** that binds believers among the Jews with those of the Gentiles, as two walls meeting together in Him, while He is, at the same time, a ***‘Stone of stumbling’*** and a ***‘Rock of offense’*** to nonbelievers.

❖ When (Christ) is presented in the Holy Bible as a rock or stone, He is a ***“rock of offense”*** to nonbelievers, and a ***“foundation stone”*** for believers (Is. 8: 14; 28: 16; Daniel 2: 34; 45; Matthew 21: 44; Luke 20: 17; Acts 5: 11; Romans 9: 33. etc.)¹.

St. Augustine

The Lord Christ came to His own; who rejected Him, that is why He says, ***“A rock of offense to My household,”*** which makes His wounds much more painful.

St. Peter quoted that prophecy (1 Peter 2: 8), proclaiming its realization in the Person of the Lord Christ.

¹ Ep., 164:7.

5. THE HOLY REMNANT

If the Lord Christ's own, or His own household have rejected Him, to turn for them into a rock of offense, yet, there has been a holy small remnant that received Him, like the disciples, the apostles, the Marys, Lazarus' household, etc. This remnant is counted as holy yeast, to be used by the Spirit of God to leaven the whole dough in the whole world.

What happened with the Lord Christ, happened in a paler way with Isaiah, being a symbol of Christ he also had honest disciples.

“Bind up the testimony. Seal the Law among my disciples.” (Is. 8: 16) A holy remnant received the words of the prophet Isaiah as true prophecies and divine words, counting them, as proclamation of God's thought and His holy will. The prophet called these **“his disciples,”** and also: **“The children whom the Lord has given me.” (Is. 8: 18)** These have to **“bind up”** or **“seal”** what they have heard, as these prophecies should be kept until the days of the New Testament, to be proclaimed to **“the babes.”** (Matthew 11: 25) Sealing them also implies a commitment to keep them with no addition or omission.

What Isaiah proclaimed was looked upon in his days as something incredible that should be opposed. That is why he and his disciples had to armor themselves with patience in the Lord (Is. 8: 17). They lived in a depressing atmosphere. **“The Lord hides His face from the house of Jacob,” (Is. 8: 17)** as though they are not His people whom they know, delivering them to their corrupted thoughts, something that brought sorrow to Isaiah and his disciples. At the same time, people looked upon them as strangers and weird, filled with folly. So he said: **“Here I am and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel, from the Lord of hosts.” (Is. 8: 18)** Which means that Isaiah and his disciples were considered as signs and wonders in the eyes of their people; as they were different in their faith, behavior, and thoughts toward the Lord.

Isaiah's disciples were considered by him as his **“children;”** carrying in that a symbol of the Lord Christ, who yearns to bind those who believe in Him by a unique bond, as that which binds a father to his children.

- ❖ He is a Brother to us, a Friend, and a Groom: **“No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends.”** (John 15: 15) And the apostle Paul says, **“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”** (2 Corinthians 11: 2) **“...That He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”** (Romans 8: 29) We are not any more, just His brothers, but we became His children, as He says, **“Here I am and the children whom the Lord has given me.”** We even became His body and members of His body¹.
- ❖ Here (Hebrews 2: 13; Isaiah 8: 18), (Christ) reveals Himself as a **“Father,”** as he previously

¹ Instructions to Catechumens 2:2.

revealed Himself as a “Brother.”¹

St. John Chrysostom

❖ [Speaking to those seeking baptism]

The angels rejoice with you, so also Christ Himself, the great High Priest... He presents you all to the Father saying, “*Here I am and the children whom God has given Me,*” to keep you all as an object of the pleasure of His eye².

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

As Isaiah presents his disciples to God, as witnesses to the truth, as a symbol of the Person of the Lord Christ, who presents His believers to the Father, as members of His body, and children of the Truth, object of the Father’s pleasure. So it is also fitting for us to take care of everyone, particularly our households, to present them to God as loving children. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Let us think seriously of our wives, children, and servants; knowing that, by this we create for ourselves a good ordinance. Our dealing with them should become much more mild and gentle³.]

6. SEEKING THE COUNSEL OF MEDIUMS AND WIZARDS

Because the people felt, as though God has hidden His face from them; they began to ask their leaders - among whom were probably some of Isaiah’s disciples - to seek the counsel of mediums and wizards, to know about things to come. The prophet speaks of them as those who “*whisper and mutter*” (**Is. 8: 19**), in pretense that they are out of this world.

What does seeking the counsel of such people signify? That man has lost all resort and help. That happened to king Saul, when he felt isolated from God, from His prophets, and even deserted by his own people. He resorted to the dead, to seek their counsel, through a medium.

It was fitting for the children of Judah, leaders and subjects, to resort to God, to seek the counsel of His prophets, and to hearken the word of God that emits light amid the darkness (**Is. 8: 20**); to gain by that a good counsel, and knowledge of God’s will, help and grace. But, to resort to mediums of all sorts, and to seek the counsel of the dead, that would mean, that they raised their eyes up to find the heavens angry (**Is. 8: 21**); then they looked to the earth to see darkness and gloom.

To make a long story short, the children of Judah have fallen in two serious transgressions: resorting to human allies instead of depending on God; and seeking the counsel of mediums and wizards, instead of enjoying the living Word of God, Grantor of enlightenment and strength.

¹ *In Heb. Hom. 4:5.*

² *Cat. Lect. 1:6.*

³ *In Eph., Hom 20.*

This painful portrait proclaims an important fact: The need for a divine Savior!

CHAPTER 9

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

As darkness prevails dawn comes, and the sun shines on those dwelling in the darkness. The previous chapter ended with a dark portrait of the people, who became in such distress and darkness; to be followed by a new chapter, that tells us about the coming of the Messiah “*the Sun of righteousness*,” who scatters the darkness, and stretches out His hand with love, waiting for all to come back to Him.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. A light has shone in the darkness | 1-5. |
| 2. The wonderful child | 6-7. |
| 3. The stretched-out hand | 8-12. |
| 4. The Lord’s chastisement | 13-21. |

1. A LIGHT HAS SHONE IN THE DARKNESS

The end of the previous chapter was utterly dark; that is why this chapter began by the word “*Nevertheless*.” God would never leave His people like that, but would shine upon them with His light.

“Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who waked in darkness have seen a great light.” (Is. 9: 1, 2) That prophecy was realized through the coming of the Lord Christ, and His preaching in the Galilee of the Gentiles. The evangelist says, “...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people walking in the darkness have seen a great light.’” (Matthew 4: 14 - 16) That region was a humble one, as expressed by Nathanael: “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” (John 1: 46) That can be explained by the fact that, that region (Galilee of the Gentiles) located on the boundary of the Gentile nations was always subjected to invasions. And because of the influence of the neighboring pagan countries, many pagan customs have infiltrated into it. Long periods of spiritual corruption led the prophet to refer to it as “*the people walking in the darkness*.”

The region of Galilee is a circle that embraced twenty cities that were given by king Solomon to Hiram, king of Tyre. Jews were there a minority, most of the people were Phoenicians, Greeks, and Arabs; hence its name “Galilee of the Gentiles.” The Lord Christ, Teacher of humanity, and Sun of righteousness, came to it to shine with His light on those

walking in the darkness. As to the region of Capernaum, meaning (the comforter), it is considered as the most important part of Galilee, Roman castle, with a powerful Roman Garrison.

- ❖ He dwelt in Galilee, in order to shine a great light on those walking in the darkness¹.
- ❖ Let those sitting in the darkness of ignorance see the great perfection of knowledge. *“Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5: 17) The letter is no more; the spirit is now dominant. The shadows vanished, and the Truth came to them².

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

- ❖ By faith, they come out of the darkness, and the death of sin, to the light and life³.

St. Augustine

- ❖ The light of the Logos, which is the life in the darkness of our souls, comes to where the rulers of this darkness, the opponents of mankind, to submit them to darkness. Those rulers will not stand fast in their strength, when the light shines upon them, the light that came to make of men, children of light⁴.

Origen

God do not allow the darkness to stay, but would shine with His light. What happens?

a. *“You have multiplied the nation.”* (Is. 9: 3) Despite falling under chastisement, through severe blows, yet it multiplies and grows through God’s mercy and grace.

b. *“And increased its joy.”* (Is. 9: 3) The nation rejoices, as though in the day of the harvest, or the enjoyment of war loot. It is as though the mystery of its joy is a plentiful crop, or a conquest or victory on the devil.

Joy is the feature of the Church of the New Testament, joyful with the evangelic life amid passions; joyful because of her continuous harvesting of numerous souls for the kingdom of heaven, and of enjoyment of her victory over the evil one. Her life is a persistent joy, on account of the repentant souls, enjoying salvation, and because of her incessant conquests.

c. Enjoyment of a glorified freedom: *“For You have broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.”* (Is. 9: 4) It will be

¹ *On the Words of the Gospel, Or. 37:2.*

² *On the Theophany, Or, 38:2.*

³ *On Ps. 88.*

⁴ *Comm, on John, Book 2:21.*

liberated from the heavy yoke, the staff, and the rod of oppression, as a symbol of freedom and salvation from servitude to the devil through the cross. The devil or his hosts have no more authority over the believer, who enjoys the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

2. THE WONDERFUL CHILD

The mystery of the nation's enjoyment of the continuous growth and the persistent joy, together with the glorious freedom, is the coming of the Messiah, as a Savior, a Conqueror and Victorious, in the name of humanity against enemies. The Son of God came, incarnated, to carry the yoke of the cross in our name, to grant us all possibilities of salvation. So the prophet says, *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of peace. Of the increase of His government and peace, there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over His Kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."* (Is. 9: 6, 7)

The faithful humanity was anticipating the divine incarnation, when the Son of God would come - the Creator, Grantor of life, and its glory, in order to restore our dead and corrupted nature to the goodness with which it has been created; through recreation and continuous renewal, to grant it the continuation of life, with joy and freedom.

a. *"For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given."* That is to say, the Son of God incarnates to become the Son of Man; and to be counted a child. He adopts our humanity, truly and perfectly, without separation from His divinity, without mingling, without confusion and without alteration. Partakes of our human life, except for sin, staying as He is: the "Son of God." The apostle says, *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil."* (Hebrew 3: 14)

❖ He became man in the body of our salvation, so as to have what he would offer on our behalf, as salvation for us all.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic¹

❖ Who is He, who wishes us to partake of His flesh and blood? He is definitely the Son of God! How had He done that, save by flesh? And how He broke the bonds of death, save by His bodily death? Christ, through bearing death, brought death to death!

St. Ambrose²

¹ Ep. 61:3.

² Of Christian Faith, 3:84

b. **“And the government will be upon His shoulder.”** He reigned on a wood; as said by the Psalmist, the wood of the Cross that He carried on His shoulder as the throne of His divine love.

- ❖ The government will be upon His shoulder, as He entered His kingdom through carrying the cross¹.

Origen

- ❖ That means the power of the cross, having used His shoulders to carry the cross.

St. Justin the Martyr²

c. **“His name will be called: Wonderful.”** as it is Incomprehensible; *“(has been) given a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.”* (Philippians 2: 9 - 11)

The disciples and apostles realized the power of the name “Jesus,” in whose name they preached, and by whom they cured the ill, cast out demons, and raised the dead.

The writings of **Origen** reveal to us how proud the early Church has been of the name “Jesus,” as the mystery of power, held by the believer, to live victorious over sin, the devil, and all forces of darkness. Of his words: [Often in His name, demons were cast out of men; especially when it is said trustingly and correctly. Great is the name “Jesus,” with its effectiveness, even when occasionally used by sinners. The name “Jesus” cures the mentally afflicted, casts away the spirits of darkness, and grants cure to the sick³.] He also proclaims that His titles reveal His numerous and rich graces, saying, [Although Christ is One in essence, yet he has several titles that refer to His authority and works. He is Grace, Righteousness, Peace, Life, Truth, and Word etc.⁴]

d. **“Counselor.”** Being the “Wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1: 24), in whom all wisdom and knowledge are treasured. In the Septuagint version, it came as the “Messenger of the great Counsel.” What is that “Great counsel, for which sake the Father has sent Him? It’s proclamation of the divine mystery to humanity, and revelation of the Father, whom no one knows except the Son, and to whom He wishes to proclaim.

- ❖ The “Son of God” is called the *“Messenger of the great counsel,”* for the sake of the things He preached, particularly His proclamation concerning the Father, saying, *“I have manifested Your Name to the men”* (John 17: 6)... He did that through words and deeds⁵.

¹ Comm, on John, Book 1:42.

² Apology 1:35.

³ Contra Celsus, 1.

⁴ Comm, in Rom. 5:6.

⁵ In John hom, 81:1.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ **There is no knowledge without faith, and no faith without knowledge...**

The Son is the true Teacher about the Father. We believe in the Son to get to know the Father, with whom is also the Son. Once again, in order to know the Father, we have to believe in the Son, that He is the Son of the Father. Knowledge of the Father and the Son, according to the true Gnostic way, is how we reach the Truth through the Truth. Indeed, few are those who believe and know!¹

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ The divine Word of God has been sent, as a Physician to sinners, and a Teacher of divine mysteries, to those who are pure with no sin².

Origen

e. **“Mighty God,”** a true God of a true God; of one essence with the Father; the only One capable of renewing our nature, being the Creator, and the Intercessor, the only One capable of redeeming the transgressions of the whole world.

f. **“Everlasting Father.”** The title **“Mighty God”** is directly followed by **“Everlasting Father,”** a proclamation that the might of the Lord Christ, the true God, is not just for the sake of demonstrating His greatness, but rather for presenting a unique fatherly love toward humanity, through which we enjoy the might of Christ in us. He is the Mighty Creator, who gives Himself to His believers, as members of His body, and as His children, to bear His possibilities in them. In other words, in Christ Jesus, the incomprehensible Might of God is proclaimed, together with His exalted practical love, so as to say with the apostle: **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”** (Philippians 4:13)

g. **“Prince of Peace.”** He is the **“King of Peace”** (1 Thessalonians 5) who offered His blood for the sake of our reconciliation with the Father, **“to have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Romans 5:1) He grants us peace with God, with ourselves, and with our brothers, abolishing the wall of inner and outer animosity.

He is the Son of David **“King and Prince,”** not on the level of earth and time, but to be eternally given by God **“the throne of His father David”** (Luke 1: 32), on the level of the inner heart and of eternity; **“with no end”** to His Kingdom or His Peace (Is. 9:7).

He reigns with truth and righteousness, hiding us in Him, to make us walk in the Truth; bearing His righteousness. It is **“the zeal of the Lord of hosts that will perform this;”** His zeal for humanity, being the heavenly Groom united to His bride.

¹ *Stromata* 5:1.

² *Contra Celsus*, 6:67

In brief, the prophet Isaiah proclaims that “*Mighty Wonderful Child,*” who does not just save Ahaz from the oppression of his enemies, but establishes a new kingdom, its foundation is the throne of David, a true kingdom of peace, that extends to peoples and nations, with “*no end.*” (Is. 9: 7) He gives us Himself, as the Source of an eternal peace.

❖ Behold, We are given the Son of God!

A little later he says, “*There will be no end*” for peace.

For the Romans, there are boundaries (end); but for the Kingdom of the Son of God, there are no boundaries.

Persia and Mede have boundaries; but the Son has no boundaries.

After that He says, “*Upon the throne of David and over his kingdom...*” the Holy Virgin Mary is a descendent of David¹.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

3. THE STRETCHED-OUT HAND

The Word of God, in His unlimited love demotes Himself to become Man, in order to give light to those who sit in the darkness; to shine His divine light on them; to grant them the light of knowledge; and to present His life to them, as a Source of joy and a continuous victory. Man, on the contrary, is bloated with pride and haughtiness, counting himself capable, with his human arm, of realizing salvation. That is what happened in the days of the prophet Isaiah, and all along the generations, even in the days of the Lord Christ, when the house of Jacob denied faith in Him. Despite that, the hand of God remains stretched out with love, waiting for man to come back.

In this chapter there are three poetic verses in Hebrew, all ending with the phrase: “*But His hand is stretched out still.*” (Is. 9: 12, 17, 20 and 10: 4)

Some consider this stretched hand, a sign of God’s invitation for man to approach, to encounter, and to unite with Him, as well as a sign of God’s protection for Him. As though He is confirming, that whatever the circumstances are, the hand of the Almighty is stretched out to save him from all evil, bitterness, and affliction. It is likewise a sign of divine chastisement, stemming from love; stretching His hand to persuade man to reconsider his situation, and to seek God’s help. These three signs were realized through the incarnation of the Word; inviting us to the adoption to the Father; offering us the free salvation; and bearing in His body the wage of sin, to draw us to Him. The divine hand is a symbol of the divine Word, who descended to us to proclaim His Father’s love, and to reconcile us with Him, through His blood, as a price for our sins and transgressions.

God, in His love, allowed for the kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) to be afflicted. Yet, in

¹ Cat. Lect. 12:24.

place of repentance, they were struck with pride and arrogance of heart. This was expressed by the prophet saying, “ ***Who say in pride and arrogance of heart: ‘the bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones. The sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars.’***” (Is. 9: 10) Some believe that the prophet here is talking about the earthquake that happened in the days of Uzziah, which most probably affected wide area (Amos 1: 1; Zechariah 14: 5); resulting in the devastation of the majority of houses, and death of a multitude, in Samaria and Ephraim. People, then, proclaimed mockingly, that if God allowed the destruction of their houses, built by mud bricks, and fall of sycamore trees, they are going to build palaces with hewn stones, and to plant cedar trees, that the earthquakes can not destroy. They were repeating what man did in the old days, when people started building the tower of Babel “*Whose top is in the heavens.*” (Genesis 11: 3, 4)

The prophet Isaiah responds to that by proclaiming a harsher divine chastisement. As long as Israel was not terrified by the earthquake, God “*shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and spur his enemies on.*” He probably meant by that, Assyria who attacked Israel, then turned against Judah. God allowed for setting up adversaries against Israel to devour it completely, as a beast devours sheep: “***They shall devour Israel with an open mouth.***” (Is. 9: 12) Yet, the mercy of God remained waiting for its return; so he goes on saying, “***For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.***” (Is. 9: 12)

4. THE LORD’S CHASTISEMENT

As people remained stonehearted, “***Therefore the Lord will cut off head and tail from Israel, palm branch and bulrush in one day.***” (Is. 9: 14)

- a. He will “*cut off the elder and honorable*” (Head and palm branch).
- b. He will “*cut off the prophets who teach lies*” (tail and bulrush).
- c. He will “*cut off the leaders who cause their people to err.*” (Is. 9: 16)
- d. “*The Lord will have no joy in their young men... have no mercy on their fatherless and widows,*” although He is “***a father of the fatherless, a defender of the widows.***” (Psalm 68: 5) “***For everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly.***” (Is. 9: 17) The Assyrian kings were so harsh, that they did not spare the young, the widows, or the fatherless, in Ephraim.
- e. “***Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts, the land is burned up, and the people shall be as fuel for the fire,***” (Is. 9: 19) not because the Lord seeks avenging Himself, but “***for wickedness burn as the fire.***” (Is. 9: 18)
- f. The whole nation will get into a condition of chaos, governed by a law of violence and

oppression, devastated by a bloody destructive civil war. ***“No man shall spare his brother, and he shall snatch on the right hand and be hungry; he shall on the left hand, and not be satisfied; every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm”*** (that is to say of his neighbor or relative). **(Is. 9: 19, 20)** That is a portrait of a society whose law is war and violence, selfishness and greed; *“consumed by one another”* (Galatians 5: 15), and as said by the prophet Haggai: *“You have sown much, and bring in little. You eat, but do not have enough. You drink, but you are not filled with drink. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.”* (Haggai 1: 6) A sign that their life is devoid of God’s blessing and grace.

f. Animosity is not confined to individuals, but extends to tribes as a whole. One tribe joins forces with another tribe against a third one etc. ***“Manasseh shall devour Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh, and they together shall be against Judah. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.”*** **(Is. 9: 21)**

CHAPTER 10

ASSYRIA ATTACKS JUDAH THE ARROGANT ASSYRIA CONDEMNED

This chapter includes two woes: The first woe is against the people's leadership because of their evil. The second woe is against Assyria, because when God allowed it to attack Judah to chastise it, Assyria got arrogant and haughty toward God, and blasphemed Him; assuming that its own gods had overcome the God of Israel.

Some believe that this chapter was written in the first years of the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah, after the fall of Samaria in the hand of Sargon, king of Assyria (Is. 10: 11).

- 1. The first woe against the leaderships 1-4.**
- 2. The second woe against Assyria 5-19.**
- 3. The remnant that escaped from Israel 20-23.**
- 4. O, My people do not be afraid 24-27.**
- 5. The Assyrian attack on Judah 28-32.**
- 6. Fall of Assyria 33-34.**

1. THE FIRST WOE AGAINST THE LEADERSHIPS

Some believe that this woe, directed to the leaderships here, is a continuation to what came in the previous chapter concerning the arrogance of Israel, basing their assumption on the fact that it also ended by that same phrase: "*For all His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still*" (Is. 9: 12, 17, 21; 10: 4). These words are thus directed to the ten tribes (Israel). Yet, the rest of it is directed to Jerusalem the capital of Judah. Some scholars believe that these woes apply to the leaderships of the two kingdoms, as they are similar in evil.

God exposes the unrighteous '*decrees*' of these leaders, demonstrated in '*prescribing misfortune*' (Is. 10: 1) and "*robbing the needy of justice, and taking what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey.*" (Is. 10: 2) And as said by Solomon: "*Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun. And Look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter... On the side of their oppressors there was power.*" (Ecclesiastes 4: 1)

And now, as Isaiah apprehends God's justice, especially in His defense of the weak, he asks these leaders: "*What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory? Without Me they shall bow down among the prisoners, and they shall fall among the slain.*"

(Is. 10: 3, 4) Punishment will surely come, especially for both the civil and religious leaderships; that are indisputable facts, as said before: “*Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.*” (Is. 3: 11) They will find no help, as what helps us is our mercy and compassion toward others. Their glories will disappear, as they were concerned with the world and not with God. Some of them will fall prisoners, to bow down in humiliation among the captives, and some will be killed when Assyria attacks, to fall among the slain. The same way they trampled the rights of the weak, others will trample them upon.

Despite all that, God still stretches his loving hand to save them from their evil: “*For all His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still*” (Is. 10: 4).

2. THE SECOND WOE AGAINST ASSYRIA

The prophet previously talked about the military might of Assyria, and its conquests, even of God’s people. He confirmed as well that what happened to the people was allowed by God for the purpose of chastisement. But Assyria got arrogant toward God, and assumed that it humiliated, and had the upper hand over the God of this people. That is why God comes to punish the proud and arrogant Assyria.

The prophet Isaiah used to talk boldly and plainly, so while he calls Assyria: “*The rod of God’s anger, and the staff in whose hand is His indignation,*” (Is. 10: 5, we find him calling God’s people “*ungodly nation,*” and, “*People of My wrath*” (Is. 10: 6); on account of that this people have demonstrated the outer appearances of worship, when corruption has really got in their inner life. That led him to call the people by repulsive names, and to proclaim that God is going to deliver them to Assyria, “*to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.*” (Is. 10: 6) Whoever ridicules the holy life in the Lord, is delivering his life to corruption and waste, and will fall down, to be mocked and treaded down by the evil one, under his feet.

Assyria did not realize that it is just an instrument for punishment (Is. 10: 7); but arrogantly said: “*Are not my princes altogether kings?*” (Is. 10: 8) namely, that the rulers set by the king of Assyria, under his leadership are all of them kings; which makes him ‘the king of kings!’

He also said: “*Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus?*” (Is. 10: 9) Scholars believe that the speaker here is Sennacherib the Assyrian king, boasting his conquests. Added to those of Sargon, who preceded him, are considered by him as conquests of Assyria as a whole, revealing that resisting the Assyrian might is of no avail.

He might have meant by *Calno* that mentioned beside Hamath and Gath in Amos 6: 2; considered to be modern *Kullanhu*, about six miles distant from Arpad, near Aleppo. It was conquered and annexed to Assyria by Tiglath-pileser in 738 B.C. Some scholars emend the

Hebrew to kullana or in Arabic ‘Kollona,’ ‘all of them’¹.

Carchemish: The Assyrian form of the name is Kargamis or Gargamis. The eastern capital of the Hittites, west of the river Euphrates, and north of its connection with Sagor. Its location is wonderfully commercial, very prosperous; from which Assur-Naser-Baal (885-860 B.C.) has confiscated a huge tax, then was taken over by Sargon II of Assyria in c. 717 B.C. By its fall, the Hittites Empire came to an end. The Romans called it Carcisium, where Jerablus (Hierapolis or Mabog) is now located.

Arpad: A city dependent on Damascus in Aram, 13 miles north to Hamath (now Hamah on the Orontes), where Tal Arpad is now located. It was taken over several times by the Assyrians in the ninth century B.C.; who were very proud of their conquest. Finally Tiglath-pileser III subjugated it in 740 B.C., after a siege of two years. It is now the ruin Tell Erfad.

Thus, the greatest cities of the Hittites and the Syrians, have failed to stand before the might of Assyria! Will the cities of Judah and Israel manage to do just that? Assyria assumed that it conquered the gods and idols, the protectors of these nations; and expected to do the same to the God of Judah and Israel (Is. 10: 10, 11), assuming that He is of the same caliber.

God allowed the king of Assyria to do that, to punish him later for his arrogance: ***“It shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, ‘I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks.’ For he says, ‘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 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; and there was no one who moved his wing, nor opened his mouth with even a peep.”*** (Is. 10: 13, 14)

The King of Assyria thought that by his own abilities and wisdom he made great things, he destroyed kings and nations, killed and became wealthy, when he invaded nations, to him it was as a helpless nest of a bird. He robbed the eggs therein and no one could stand before his face or utter a word.

The king of Assyria did not apprehend that he is just an ax or a saw, used by God for punishment. The instrument got arrogant toward its user; So God is going to chastise him:

- a. ***“Will send leanness among his fat ones,”*** namely his mighty worriers (Is. 10: 16).
- b. ***“And under his glory* (namely his army), ***He will kindle a burning fire”*** (Is. 10: 16) to turn it into ashes. ***“The light of Israel will be for a fire, and His Holy One for a flame. It will burn and devour (the enemy).”*** (Is. 10: 17) In other words, God, the light of believers, and the**

¹ *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois.*

mystery of sanctity of their life, will be a burning fire and a flame to consume the evil adversaries

c. He will abolish his army, to leave only a few numbers, so that a child can write down their names (Is. 10: 19). As far as their strength is concerned, they will lose their physical and psychological energy, and **“will be as when a sick man wastes away.” (Is. 10: 18)**

3. THE REMNANTS THAT ESCAPED OF ISRAEL

Prophets have often talked of the “remnant” that would be saved; meaning by that the few who stay honest to God, amid the collapse of the religious leaderships, the corruption of judges, of rulers, and also of the people. This remnant that will keep itself from the corruption and defilement of the congregation, will be spared the bitter affliction during *“the hour of trial.”* (Revelation 3: 10) That remnant that will be saved from the oppression of Assyria, will not just rejoice for its return to Jerusalem, but for what is far greater; it will rejoice for its encounter with the mighty God of Israel (Is. 10: 21).

The apostle Paul quoted the words of Isaiah 10: 22, 23, saying, *“Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: ‘though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.’”* (Romans 9: 27, 28)

These words of Isaiah (10: 22, 23 LXX) carried a prophecy about the captives, who were great in number, far exceeding the few who were spared falling into captivity. God allowed that chastisement for the sake of righteousness. The apostle applied this prophecy in a wider sense, on the messianic era, when a great number of Jews got captivated through denial, rejecting belief in the Messiah. Few are those who are saved, through receiving the saving Messiah. God allowed that for the sake of righteousness, to open the door before the Gentiles¹.

St. John Chrysostom comments saying, [He means that He does not care about quantity (great number), nor about race (the Jews); but He saves whom are worthy of salvation. He mentions *“as the sand of the sea”* to remind them of the old covenant (Genesis 22: 17; 23: 12), of which they made themselves unworthy. Why do you complain then, if that covenant fails to be realized for all? All prophets have revealed that not everyone will be saved. Then the apostle also reveals the way of salvation. *“For He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth”* (Romans 9: 28). This (work) is the faith that carries salvation in few words: *“that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* (Romans 10: 9) Therefore, you see that the Lord is *“making a short work on earth.”* That *“short work”* does not carry only salvation, but righteousness as well]².

¹ راجع للمؤلف: رسالة بولس الرسول إلى أهل رومية، 1985، 205.

² In Rom. Hom. 17.

He says also: [So that you do not think that God only cares for great number, he says, “For though your people, O, Israel, be as the sand of the sea, yet a *remnant of them will return.*”^{1]}

St. Augustine says, [This is the remnant of that nation, that believes in Christ².]

4. MY PEOPLE, DO NOT BE AFRAID!

Some scholars believe that the prophecy here refers to the following: When Hezekiah son of Ahaz and his successor refused to pay the tax, the Assyrian Sennacherib attacked Judah with a strong army and put Jerusalem under siege. He was about to take the city, but God’s will was to save it. The enemy was utterly destroyed and Sennacherib escaped to be killed by his children (2 Chronicles 32).

The prophecy here, demonstrates an important issue: that God is working all the time. God keeps instructing His people not to fear; He is the Father committed for our life, salvation, growth, and peace. He works in all generations, with an exalted arm for the salvation of His believers. If the exodus of the children of Israel has been a supreme act, that revealed God’s care for those believing in Him. Here, in the time of Hezekiah, He repeats their exodus or salvation, on a mightier level, amid bitterness felt by all.

God asks His people not to fear Assyria, for it will be destroyed, “***The Lord of hosts will stir up a scourge for him***” (Is. 10: 26) “*sent an angel who cut down every man of valor... in his camp.*” (2 Chronicles 32: 21) As He previously destroyed Oreb the prince of Median (Judges 7: 25; Psalms 83: 11), and as He did with Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, by the rod of Moses (Is. 10: 26); So He will destroy Assyria, “***It shall come to pass in that day, that his burden will be taken away from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck; and the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil*** (the sacred anointment given to king David and to his children after him) “ (Is. 10: 27)

The second issue is that the anointed, namely the mighty Messiah, will grant comfort and peace on all earth, through His blessed reign. This is the main line in the whole book, and in the Holy Scripture with both its Old and New Testaments.

5. THE ASSYRIAN INVASION OF JUDAH

Before the talk of the fall of Assyria, the prophet talked about the Assyrian invasion of Judah, to demonstrate its great military might, and its swift advance toward Jerusalem the capital, together with the weakness of Judah’s resistance, if not its absence altogether; and how Judah was terrified (Is. 10: 28 - 32). The prophet presented a poetic narration to reveal the affliction of the cities of Judah; then to tell how Sennacherib stopped at Nob (a city for priests north of

¹ In 2 Cor,2.

² City of God 18:33.

Jerusalem), probably to give his army some rest before attacking Jerusalem. Sennacherib stood there to “*shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.*” (Is. 10: 32) He stood there as a mighty tree; and did not know that the Lord allowed to hew him down, to humble him, and to cut away his haughty branches.

By this prophecy God does not mean Sennacherib alone, but every evil action to oppress the Church of God, or any of His children.

6. THE FALL OF ASSYRIA

God proclaims the complete devastation of Assyria; “*He cut down the thickets of the forest with iron*” to bring his haughtiness down to the dust (Is. 10: 33, 34). That is the fruit of arrogance and pride!

CHAPTER 11

THE MESSIAH AND THE MESSIANIC AGE

It was not possible for the prophet Isaiah to confine himself to contemporary events, or even to those of the near future, he looked forward to eternal salvation, to anticipate the amazing work of God, not through the fall of Assyria, and the return of the little honest remnant to Judah, but rather, through the fall of the devil, and the gathering together of believers, of Jews and Gentiles, as members of one body, to enjoy the amazing Messianic Kingdom.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. The appearance of Jesse's offspring | 1. |
| 2. The Savior and God's Spirit | 2. |
| 3. The works of the Savior | 3-4. |
| 4. Features of the Messianic age | 5-9. |
| 5. Peace among nations | 10-16. |

1. THE APPEARANCE OF JESSE'S OFFSPRING

In the ninth chapter, he talked about the Savior, as being the "Wonderful Child": "*For unto us a child is born... And His name will be called: Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*" (Is. 9: 6) But here, he confirms his 'humanity,' being the King the Son of Jesse. "***There shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.***" (Is. 11: 1) He did not say 'the Son of David,' although He legally is, but he intended to present Him in a very modest image, as a rod and a branch of Jesse, who lived and died humble. The strange thing, is that the offspring of king David, was remarkably weekend, until St. Joseph and the Virgin St. Mary came in total poverty.

The previous chapter, while talking of Assyria, representing the enemy of the Church, as "*bough of high stature*" (Is. 10: 33), the Messiah appears as a humble "*rod or branch,*" who intended to crush 'pride,' the destroyer of mankind, through His humility. And as the Church says about Him, in Good Friday: 'He demonstrated through weakness (the cross), what is greater than strength.'

- ❖ That is Christ; He was conceived through the power of God, from a Virgin, of the offspring of Jacob, father of Judah, and father of the Jews, an offspring of Jesse¹.

¹ *Apology I:32.*

2. THE SAVIOR AND GOD'S SPIRIT

“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him; the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of counsel and might; the Spirit of Knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Is. 11: 2)

As the Lord Christ came, a representative of humanity, the Holy Spirit rested upon Him, who is not a stranger to Him, being His Spirit. The resting of the Holy Spirit upon Christ, is different from its resting upon us. For Him, it is a “Personal” resting, being One with Him, in the same essence, with the Father, a resting without limit. As for us, it is a free gift, and a grace, granted to us in Jesus Christ, as much as our nature can stand, to work on its continuous renewal. That is why it is said about the Lord Christ: *“For it pleased the Father, that in Him, all the fullness should dwell.”* (Colossians 1: 19) *“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”* (Colossians 2: 9) *“And of His fullness, we have all received, and grace for grace.”* (John 1: 16)

The Word of God is wisdom itself, the understanding and the might. The resting of the Holy Spirit on Him is not a temporarily resting, but it is an eternal union between the three Persons. Through the divine incarnation, our Lord Jesus, received the Holy Spirit resting upon Him, in order to grant us in Him, as members of His Body the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of the wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord.

Some may ask: Why did the Holy Spirit rest upon the Lord Christ at His Epiphany? We answer¹: The Holy Spirit had His role in the incarnation of the Logos. And as the divinity of the Lord has never parted from His humanity, therefore His humanity was never isolated from the Holy Spirit, and was not in need of its renewal, as it has never fallen in sin, and the old man had no place in Him. The Lord received baptism in order to *“to fulfill all righteousness”* (Matthew 3: 15); namely, to present to us a new righteousness, to carry in us through His Holy Body. The resting of the Holy Spirit upon Him was as a matter of fact for the sake of humanity that is sanctified in Him, receiving His Holy Spirit.

St. Gregory of Nyssa says, [Today (Jesus) was baptized by John to purify what was defiled; and to let the Spirit descend from above, to raise man to heaven, and to raise the fallen who got down into shame. Christ has put right all evil; took complete humanity to save humanity; and to become an example for everyone of us. That is why He sanctifies the first fruit and fruit of every work He does, in order to give His subjects a good zeal to follow suit².]

St. Gregory Nazianzus talks of the work of the Holy Spirit in our life, as a source of

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981، ص 215.

² *De Bapt. Christii.*

goodness, saying,

[He is called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ... He is God Himself.

The Spirit of prophesy, of Truth, and of freedom.

The Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, goodness and fear of God. He is the Creator of all.

He fills all with His essence, and includes all things.

He fills the world in His essence. Yet, despite that, the world cannot apprehend His might.

He is good, straightforward, royal by nature, and not through adoption.

He sanctifies, and is not sanctified.

He measures, and is not measured.

He grants fellowship, and is in no need of it.

He fills, and is not filled.

He is infinite, and not finite.

He is glorified, with the Father and the Son.

He is God's finger, a fire as God (the Father).

He is the Creator Spirit that recreates through Baptism and Resurrection.

He is the Spirit who knows everything, that blows wherever He desires.

He instructs, sends, designates, proclaims, illuminates, and gives life; He is light and life.

He creates temples and grants deification (i.e. fellowship with God).

He grants perfection even before Baptism (as what happened with Cornelius, Acts 10: 9). After Baptism, you seek it as a gift... to do in us the divine work; divides into tongues of fire, distributing gifts.

He designates apostles, prophets, evangelists, priests, and preachers.

He teaches in several ways; clearly inspiring the hearts...¹]

3. WORKS OF THE SAVIOR

“His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears.’ But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.” (Is. 11: 3, 4)

a. The Lord Christ offers to us a living portrait of how to deal with others; namely not to base our relations merely on outer appearances; and not to let our senses be the main criteria for making our decisions.

As the sense of smell is the quickest in man's life, it should be saturated, together with

¹ Oration 5 on the Holy Spirit, 29.

the other senses, with the fear of God. Here we have to differentiate between three kinds of fear: slavery fear; fear of laborers; and filial fear. Slaves fear their masters lest they kill them; laborers fear their employers lest they deprive them of their wages; while children fear their parents lest they hurt their feelings. That exalted fear, is the one granted to us by the Holy Spirit, in order to fear God, not for the sake of avoiding punishment, or deprivation of reward, but because we are children who do not want to hurt their father's feelings.

b. ***“He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,” (Is. 11: 3)*** but according to the inner depths, being aware of the hearts, thoughts and intentions. The Lord takes a stand, against what has been the common practice in the days of Isaiah, when judges used to judge according to appearances and faces. This partiality was a curse that often affects those committed to responsibilities of leadership. The Lord had been very firm as far as that situation is concerned. He used to rebuke the scribes, Pharisees and Seduces for their hypocrisies, while compassionately inviting children, and mildly treating tax collectors and sinners.

c. Rejecting human telltale: ***“Nor decide by the hearing of His ears.” (Is. 11: 3)***

d. Taking interest in ***“the poor and the meek of the earth.” (Is. 11: 4)***

e. ***“He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth.” (Is. 11: 4)*** The Lord came to strike with His word (*the rod of His mouth*), with the two-edged “sword of His mouth” (Revelation 2: 16; 19: 6) whoever attached himself to the love of earthly things, to become like earth. His goal was to destroy in us worldly love, to raise all our energies toward the heavenly things. He came to put to death, with His Holy Spirit (*the breath of His lips*), human hypocrisy, so that believers would live by the Holy Spirit in them, without getting preoccupied with the deceiving appearances.

f. ***“Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.” (Is. 11: 5)*** Rich people in the Near East used to wear a belt ornamented with golden threads, as a mark of splendor and dignity, as well as to raise up the wide robe. The poor on the other hand especially slaves used a cheap sort of belt, to raise up their garments, to help them to move swiftly for the sake of serving their masters and guests. Soldiers also used that belt. Anyway, the Lord Christ came to the world a spiritual King, girded with the belt of righteousness and faithfulness, as a sign of beauty and splendor, being the Holy One, the Grantor of the holy life. At the same time, He came as a Servant, girded to wash the feet of humanity, and to sanctify all who come to Him.

Righteousness is often likened to a robe or belt, as with the righteousness of Christ, with which we clothe ourselves to work and strife (Job 29: 13; Psalm 109: 18, 19; Ephesians 6: 13 . 17; Revelation 19: 8).

4. FEATURES OF THE MESSIANIC AGE

After talking about the work of the Lord Christ, he proceeded to talk about the Messianic age, presenting to us a living portrait of it, its most prominent feature is the union of humanity, believing in Him, in one body, carrying the nature of love and peace; leading a life in which all signs of rebellion, violence, love of blood shedding, killing, and destruction, have disappeared. He portrays that messianic age, saying,

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb.” (Is. 11: 6) There is no greater contrast, the blood thirsty wolf dwelling with the defenseless meek lamb; a ferocious man with a wolfy heart dwelling with one as meek as a lamb; carrying a new nature governed by a law of love and companionship. He, who has been a wolf before, is not anymore threatening the lamb nor the lamb fearing him. All are turned into one flock, carrying the new nature in Jesus Christ.

“The leopard shall lie down with the young goat.” (Is. 11: 6) The first is some animal that watches his prey to jump over it, while the other is carelessly playing around, challenging the leopard to attack it. Yet the beastly nature of violence has been taken away from the leopard, to let it lie down with the young goat.

“The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” (Is. 11: 6) A strange flock, of no harmony, with an equally strange leadership! Who could imagine a little child leading such a flock? That little child refers to the religious leadership of the Church, that can, with the spirit of simplicity, with the Spirit of the Lord, turn believers of different nations and of various cultures into a meek flock, submitting with the spirit of the gospel, as though to a little child.

The meek leaderships, as a little child, that does not know the love of authority, can turn young lions into meek lambs, through the work of Spirit of the Lord.

“The cow and the bear shall graze.” (Is. 11: 7) St. Clement of Alexandria¹, believes that the cow refers to Jews, being among animals under yoke, clean according to the Law, while the bear refers to the Gentiles and pagan nations, being savage, and unclean according to the Law. According to the Messianic age, members of Jew origin, would gather together with others of the Gentiles in a unified “flock,” under the leadership of One Good Shepherd.

A bear, although fierce, yet it is relatively slow in movement. That is why a grazing cow would be for it, a valuable and easy prey, not like a young ox. Despite that situation, we see an amazing atmosphere of reconciliation and companionship between them, as well as in between their young ones; as it is said: ***“Their young ones shall lie down together.” (Is. 11: 7)*** That was what actually happened, as the new generations of the Church of the New Testament came with no distinction between those of Jewish origin and of Gentile origin.

¹ Strom. 4:6.

“And the lion shall eat straw like the ox,” (Is. 11: 7) having lost its beastly nature, and turned into a domesticated animal, that does not seek flesh but straw for food.

“And the nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den.” (Is. 11: 8) The cobra and the viper have lost their fatal venom.

The Lord Christ worked on changing the savage human nature through His ministers, with their spirit of meekness. The church as a whole both ministers and ministered, carrying the spirit of love and unity, being the Holy Mountain of the Lord, would not be infected with corruption. **“For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Is. 11: 9)**; not just a pure philosophical intellectual knowledge, but it is one of convergence, union, and practical experience of the new life in the Lord. That spiritual knowledge would naturally fill the life of believers, realized through the incarnation of the Word of God, who came to let us know the Truth and the work of His Holy Spirit. **“The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Is. 11: 9)** The Lord Himself says, **“All your children shall be taught by the Lord”** (John 6: 45; Is. 54: 13; Jeremiah 31: 34; Micah 4: 2; Hebrew 8: 10; 10: 16).

St. Macarius the Great talks to us about that practical spiritual knowledge, saying, [As the soul unifies with the comforting Spirit, in an indescribable companionship, completely melding with the Spirit, would become itself worthy to be counted as a Spirit. Through its mixing with it, all of it would turn into a light, an eye, a spirit, joy, comfort, love, goodness, and compassion¹.]

5. PEACE AMONG NATIONS

a. The Lord Christ came to establish His kingdom of all peoples and nations; granting peace to true believers. **“And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people. For the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.” (Is. 11: 10)**

The apostle Paul quoted this prophecy, as he talked about the Gentiles glorifying God for His mercy upon them (Romans 15: 6, 12), indicating that saying **“that day”** was realized by the coming of the Messiah, who embraced the Gentiles in His kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ became like a **“Banner,”** around which He could **“gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad”** (John 11: 52), to become one flock for one Shepherd. The Lord became a Banner, that proclaims divine love, in the deepest form, having been lifted up on the cross, with His hands stretched to embrace the whole world in His bosom (John 12: 32); joyfully preaching the gospel of salvation, that restored to man his former dignity, and his conquest of the forces of darkness; opening for him the gates of paradise.

He says, **“The Gentiles shall seek Him,”** the desire of nations; sought by the Greeks

¹ Hom. 18:10.

(John 12: 20, 21). The Centurion Cornelius of the Gentiles sent for Simon Peter to hear from him about the Lord Christ (Acts 10).

“His resting place shall be glorious.” (Is. 11: 10) Meaning by this, His cross that was previously considered as shame became, through His resurrection, a glory. His empty tomb turned into a sanctuary for believers; apprehending in it the Truth of their Christ, the Grantor of Life and resurrection.

b. The Lord Christ embraced into His Church, the remnant that received salvation, who were scattered abroad (Acts 2; James 1: 1; 1 Peter 1: 1). Thus the prophet says, ***“It shall come to pass on that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time, to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush; from Elam and Shinar; from Hamath and the islands of the sea.” (Is. 11: 11)*** This prophecy was fulfilled on the day of the Pentecost, and also through the ministry of the apostles. Along the generations it will be realized in a greater degree in the last days, when the Jews will receive faith in the Lord Christ, as said by the apostle Paul (Romans 11: 11-27). On that day, the new receivers of faith of the Jews would join the Church, that has previously embraced the Gentiles, to make of all of them members of one body. ***“He will set up a banner for the nations; and will assemble the outcasts of Israel; and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” (Is. 11: 12)***

Some scholars¹ try to count that as a glory for the nation of Israel in a literal way. But it is here, rather a proclamation of the glory of the Church that embraces both Jews and Gentiles together, from all corners of the earth, without any racial distinction. All becoming one Church, that carries the banner of her One Christ.

c. The union that took place between Israel (Ephraim) and Judah after their return from captivity, after long generations of animosity, presents a portrait of the union anticipated between the Jews and the Gentiles (Is. 11: 13).

In the past, the Philistines, peoples of Edom, Ammon, Moab, Egypt, were all opponents of the people. That is why God granted His people the possibility of overcoming them (Is. 11: 14 - 16). However, in the New Testament, victory would not turn into instruments for destruction but for construction. God, who turned the sea into an instrument of salvation for His people, letting them walk across it, is capable of drying up every resistance in the hearts of nations, to open up the highway of the Messianic Kingdom.

In other words, He who got His people out of the land of Egypt, crossing with them the Red Sea, and let them cross from Assyria after the captivity (Is. 11: 16), would help nations to cross over to His kingdom, in spite of all difficulties that may face them.

¹ Bultema, p. 149.

CHAPTER 12

PRAISE BY THE REDEEMED

Isaiah, having surpassed a condition of depression that affected his soul, because of the extent of corruption reached by his people, that led God to chastise them through Assyria. Then, having seen the redemptive work of God, not only by bringing back the captives to Judah, but by what is far greater than that, by the anticipated appearance of the Son of Jesse, a Banner for the nations, who is to gather together, through His exalted love, His believers from all nations, to enjoy His heavenly peace. The prophet could not help but to record, on behalf of these redeemed by the blood of the Savior, a joyful praise, considered as an extension of the prophecy mentioned in the previous chapter, that praises the glory of Christ, His Person, His work, and His Kingdom.

1. God's mercies amid His anger 1.
2. Jehovah, the mystery of our salvation, strength, and joy 2-3.
3. Testifying to God's works 4-6.

1. GOD'S MERCIES AMID HIS ANGER

“And in that day you will say, ‘O Lord, I will praise You. Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.’” (Is. 12: 1)

That new praise, uttered by everyone enjoying the redemptive work of the Lord Christ, begins with the words: *“And in that day you will say....”* What day is that? It is the day of the cross, the great day of redemption, in which we praise the Lord who turned anger into salvation, comfort, and glory. Through the crucifixion of the Lord Christ, the incarnate Word of God, we were lifted up from anger to glory; the amazing comfort of God was demonstrated by setting us free, from captivity of Satan, his hosts, and his evil works, to let righteousness reign in us.

Such will be our praise and thanksgiving for the Lord, not the way the Pharisee did, as he stood in the temple boasting over others, but like the thief on the right hand, expelled out of the camp, because of his sins, to encounter in his company, the Lord Christ, crucified for his sake, to open the gates of Paradise for him. The anger of God on us is thus turned into exalted, heavenly, and divine comforts. In that day, He Himself became our peace (Ephesians 2: 14); and in it, *“God reconciled the world to Himself.”* (2 Corinthians 5: 19)

2. JEHOVAH, THE MYSTERY OF OUR SALVATION, STRENGTH AND JOY

“Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. For YAH, the Lord, is my strength and my song. He also has become my salvation. Therefore with joy you will draw

water from the wells of salvation.” (Is. 12: 2, 3)

The Coptic Church quoted a part of this song to praise the crucified Lord in the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, which is: ***“My strength and praise is the Lord, Who became salvation for me.”*** God is the source of our strength, our praise, and our salvation! In the midst of partaking of the Passion of her Groom, the Church praises and sings. Her praise and song is Christ Himself; who is everything for her.

Through the crucified Christ, we knew the *“joyful sound”* (Psalm 89: 15), that of the conquest over Satan and his evil deeds! Through the joyful sound of salvation we move from the left hand to the right, to enjoy the fellowship of the joyful heavenly kingdom.

Through the cross, a fountain of blood and water came out of the pierced side for us to be sanctified and purified. From it, we joyfully drink, having found the fountain of eternal salvation.

Here, he calls God ***“YAH, the Lord.”*** YAH a brief of the word Jehovah, the divine name of the eternal unchangeable God, to confirm that on Him, the believer leans, to find in Him his strength, joy, and salvation forever, to get comfort without fear. And as said by **St. Augustine**, [If you want your joy to abide and to stay, get attached to the eternal God, who suffers no change, but remains forever steadfast¹.]

3. TESTIFYING TO THE WORKS OF GOD

Some see that the previous phrases (Is. 12: 1 - 3) represent praise separate from the phrases that follow (Is. 12: 4 - 6). However, if the first one proclaims a setting forth of praise in the soul, through enjoying God’s salvation, the second one is complementing it, proclaiming a commitment to testify to God the Savior of nations. What we experience through our union with God our Savior makes us yearn to get others to enjoy the same salvation. ***“And in that day you will say, ‘Praise the Lord; Call upon His name. Declare His deeds among the peoples. Make mention that His name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, for He has done excellent things. This is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For Great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst’”*** (Is. 12: 4 - 6)

How do we testify to the Lord?

a. By preaching: ***“Declare His deeds among the peoples.”*** And as the Lord says to His disciples, ***“Go to the whole world; and preach the gospel to all creation.”*** (Mark 16: 5) Every believer is committed to witness to His Savior. We see the Psalmist David in his 50th Psalm proclaiming his repentance, saying, ***“Give me the joy of Your salvation... Then I shall teach the transgressors Your ways.”***

b. By the holy Joy: ***“Sing to the Lord. For He has done excellent things. This is known***

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981، ص 130.

in all the earth.” There is no greater witness to the Savior than to let others feel our inner joy in the Lord, which goes above all troubles and events. The Psalmist says, “*I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Your wondrous work.*” (Psalm 26: 5, 7)

The voice of inner joy witnesses to God’s is dwelling in us! The holy joy proclaims the joyful kingdom of God in us! In the biography of St. Apollo the priest of Thebes, on the boundary of Hermopolis (Ashmonin), we read that his face has been joyful all the time; through which he drew many toward the ascetic life, as being joyful inside, and fulfilling the heart with God Himself. He often said, [Why would we strife with a gloomy face? Aren’t we the inhabitants of eternal life? Leave the gloom for the pagans and sinners. The righteous and saints should smile and be joyful, as they enjoy the spirituals¹.]

¹ للمؤلف: قاموس آباء الكنيسة وقديسيها، ج 1، 1986، ص 113.

CHAPTER 13

A PROPHECY ABOUT BABYLON

As the prophet spoke of the Lord Christ and His glory, he did not want anyone to think that this thing will happen in his time, or in the near future. That is why he prophesied about Babylon, and what is going to happen to the people during the Babylonian captivity, and their return from captivity.

Before the first coming of the Lord Christ, the kingdom of Babylon appeared with all its might, to get destroyed afterwards. The Messiah then came to reign, with no end to His reign. The same thing is to occur on His second coming, when the kingdom of the antichrist would appear, like the kingdom of Babylon, to oppose the Church and to prevail over the world, then eventually to collapse before the Lord of glory, who will come on the clouds.

Babylon and all the other fierce nations represent opposition to God and His Church. The prophecy here came to tell that all the forces opposing God, His Christ, and His people, will eventually collapse and fall.

- 1. A prophecy about Babylon** 1.
- 2. A call to the nations to fight Babylon** 2-5.
- 3. The day Babylon was destroyed** 6-22.

1. A PROPHECY ABOUT BABYLON

“The burden against Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.” (Is. 13: 1)

The prophet wanted to confirm that he was the author of that prophecy proclaimed against Babylon. As to the confirmation that he was the one who saw it, that was for two reasons:

a. If Isaiah had prophesied about Judah and Jerusalem, he is now talking about the destiny of the neighboring countries; a confirmation that the God of saints is Himself the God of all nations.

b. As Babylon was not taken into seriously at that time, it was rather difficult for anyone to believe the prophecies concerning it.

The word ‘prophecy’ in Hebrew is ‘*massah*,’ translated in the Targum, Vulgate, and Syrian versions as ‘*burden*.’ That was probably on account of, that the prophet, due to his gentle nature, had a feeling of bitterness that weighed upon him like a burden, toward the troubles and divine chastisements that are to happen to these nations. Although he knew that they have earned them, and will finally turn to their benefit, yet, as a man of God, he was filled with sorrow. With such a spirit, the early Church used to chastise, yet with love and compassion, never to close the

door of repentance before sinners, even those who denied faith. Novatius and his likes were considered heretics, because of their **harsh attitude toward sinners**. And as **St. Ambrose** says concerning them: [By this, they condemned their corrupt teaching; denying their authority to loosen they also denied their authority to bind... What should I say of their arrogance? It contradicts the Spirit of the Lord who tends more toward mercy. The Judge, who has the right to chastise, is, through His mercy, the forgiver! When He says, “*For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*” (Hosea 6: 6) How can He receive offerings from those who deny mercy? He who says, “*For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the Lord God. Repent and live*” (Ezekiel 18: 32)¹.]

Certain scholars believe that what was mentioned about Babylon in chapters 13 and 14 are not by the prophet Isaiah, basing their view on the following grounds:

a. Babylon at that time has been closely allied with Judah (Is. 39); how could he proclaim such a harsh prophecy against it?

b. Babylon has been, out of weakness, submitted to Assyria.

c. According to the prophecy, it seems that Israel would be captivated to Babylon.

To respond to this, we say that the prophet spoke of the future with the spirit of prophecy. So he referred to chastising Israel by Assyria, then to the situation of Babylon later on, when it becomes a great kingdom after the destruction of Assyria; to the captivity of the people and their return; and finally to the coming of Immanuel, the Savior, at the fulfillment of time. The prophet talks about the future as a present, he is living through, which was natural to all prophets, in order to confirm that what they proclaim is to be eventually fully realized. We cannot also ignore that the prophet who happened to present such details on the Person of the Lord Christ, His life, His redeeming work, and features of His time can surely prophesy on establishing the kingdom of Babylon, and the captivity of the people by it, something to be realized after about 100 years of the proclamation of that prophecy. The prophet Jeremiah, later on, during the Babylonian time, echoed the same cries of Isaiah.

Lastly, the prophet Isaiah’s talk about the return from Assyrian captivity (Is. 11) and his warnings concerning the Babylonian captivity (Is. 39) indicate that that topic was not far from his thoughts.

2. A CALL TO THE NATIONS TO FIGHT BABYLON

The greatness of Babylon was not yet there, but the prophet saw it coming, its capital a city of nobles. That is why he begins his prophecy concerning it by God’s persuasion of the

¹ *On Repentance 1.*

nations to join forces against Babylon, to break through its gates, and to trample on its pride, saying, ***“Lift up a banner on a bare hilltop.”*** (Is. 13: 2). God is issuing a decree to declare a war against Babylon, by inviting the nations to lift up a banner on the top of a mountain bare of trees, to let it be easily seen by all the armies, as a declaration of war.

“Raise your voice to them. Wave your hand that they may enter the gates of the noble (the mighty).” (Is. 13: 2) He encourages the forces to break through the city of the nobles with courage.

What is ***Babylon***, but that arrogant soul, which we have to overcome, not by banners of war, by the voices of horns, nor by waving of human hands, but through lifting up the banner of love that of our crucified Christ, to say, ***“His banner over me was love.”*** (Song 2: 4) Let us blow the horn of the gospel, joyful to the souls. Let us stretch the hand of practical love, to support the weak soul, humiliated by pride. That way, we overcome the soul, by the Spirit of the Lord working in us, to draw it to His heavenly kingdom, through the spiritual war, active by divine grace, and not by human work.

The talk here is far greater than to be confined to a call to Persia and Medes to declare war against the great empire of Babylon. It is rather an invitation concerned with the eternal salvation of the soul. That is why he goes on saying, ***“I have commanded My sanctified ones. I have also called My mighty ones for My anger - those who rejoice in My exaltation. The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like that of many people! A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together! The Lord of hosts musters the army for battle. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven. Even the Lord and His weapons of indignation, to destroy the whole land.”*** (Is. 13: 3-5)

In this text, it is to be noticed:

(1) Who are those sanctified ones, referred to God, to be used in that battle? Some believe that they were the military leaderships of Persia and Medes, called to a holy war, not because they were saints in their life or their faith, but because God invited them to realize, unaware, His holy goals, and granted them the strength to act. They were counted as God’s heroes, despite their disbelief in Him; like the pagan king Cyrus, who was called ***“God’s anointed,”*** whose right hand God held to trample nations before him etc. (Is. 45: 1).

Such is the amazing goodness of God; turning the works and energies of even the wicked, to the growth of His kingdom and the edification of souls. If God calls the pagans who have overcome Babylon, ***‘His sanctified,’*** how will He consider His children, the ***‘spiritual soldiers,’*** who are truly His saints, being chosen for the holy spiritual work, who are fighting against the devil, and all his evil acts, for the sake of sanctifying their depths, and those of others, through gaining them by divine love. He calls them His ***‘heroes,’*** as they work by His strength and His Holy Spirit, and counts them as ***“those who rejoice in My exaltation,”*** realizing the

glory of the great name of God.

The saintly Fathers believe that Baptism is an entrance into spiritual military corps. The seal of the Holy Spirit signs those who are baptized, to be counted as spiritual soldiers for the kingdom of the Lord.

- ❖ As each of you comes and presents himself before the Lord, in the presence of the uncountable angelic hosts. The Holy Spirit puts His sign on your souls, to be counted among the hosts of the Great King¹.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

- ❖ As a seal is put on soldiers, the Holy Spirit is put on believers².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Whoever receives the bath of renewal likens a novice soldier who is placed among veterans; yet to prove his worthiness for that honor³.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

(2) *“A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together! The Lord of hosts musters the army for battle.” (Is. 13: 4)* What is that noise, but the noise of the Church gathering together in the spirit of love and unity on the holy mountains, to enjoy the exalted life. She dwells on the summit of blessed commandments, not at the plains. She is gathered from numerous kingdoms and nations, as *“an army with banners.”* (Songs 6: 10) There are numerous Churches, of various cultures, yet, through the one faith and one thought, live as a heavenly spiritual army. This is the sign of the true Church; a heavenly Church! The apostle Paul says, *“We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, such as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* (2 Corinthians 3: 18)

- ❖ Many, who have waged war against the Church, perished, but the Church soared up in the skies.
- ❖ The Church is your hope, salvation, and refuge. It is higher than heaven, and wider than the world.

St. John Chrysostom⁴

“They come from a far country, from the end of heaven. Even the Lord and His

¹ PG. 33:333A, 428 A.

² PG. 61:418.

³ PG. 46. 429C.

⁴ On Eutropius, hom 2.

weapons of indignation, to destroy the whole land.” (Is. 13: 5) The Church gathers together “*from a far country.*” Most of her members were before pagans attached to the world, foreigners to the house of God. But they became now the Lord’s heaven and sanctuary, destroying worldly thoughts and earthly love, to carry others to experience heavenly life. It is as though the destruction of land, means destruction of the closure of the heart around the earthly things, to open to heaven. And as **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, [The land, for the (Gnostic) believer turns into heaven.]

That is from the allegoric side; but literally, God has called on Nations: Persia and Medes, to use them to destroy the great land of Babylon.

3. THE DAY BABYLON WAS DESTROYED

The prophet presents to us a horrible portrait of the day Babylon was destroyed on the hands of Persia and Medes, as the day of the Lord, in which He proclaims His wrath on Babylon His opponent and that of His children.

Cyrus who, though he, himself, was not that fierce, but his army has been savage and wild realized that. The troops destroyed Babylon, not to loot its treasures, as much as for the sake of shedding blood.

Some believe that what actually took place, is going to happen on a larger and more comprehensive scale at the end of time, as recorded in the book of Revelation (17), concerning “*the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, the great Babylon, mother of harlots.*”

I say that this prophecy proclaims what is to happen to the kingdom of the devil, not just in the last days, but in the heart of every one who receives the Lord Christ as a King, to establish in it a new Jerusalem in place of Babylon the harlot; that is to say, to establish His holy city in place of the kingdom of the devil.

a. The prophet says, “***Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp.***” (Is. 13: 6) Babylon became the mistress of the whole world. God was longsuffering toward it for years. Yet, the Babylonians, getting far with their pride of heart and their arrogance even toward the Lord Himself, He caused them to fall under His wrath, and their fierce hands to get limp and so weak to be able to bear their arms, to become the subject of mockery.

This is the image of the devil as revealed by **St. John Chrysostom** in a letter to his fallen friend Theodore, saying that the devil appears fierce and mighty, yet, as we bear our Christ, he becomes weak and collapses. And in an essay about: the authority of man to oppose the devil, he says, [The devil is evil; I admit that. But he is evil as far as himself is concerned, and not to us, as long as we are cautious. This is the nature of evil. It is destructive for those who attach

themselves solely to him¹.]

b. **“Every man’s heart will melt, and they will be afraid.” (Is. 13: 7, 8)** Thus all will be overcome by fear and horror - men, women, youth, elders and children - all will collapse, nobody will be able to support his brother, but everyone will destroy himself as well as all those around him!

The source of their fear is their deprivation of the fear of God. He who fears God does not fear any man or event, but becomes filled with joy and peace. It is said: *“The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.” (Psalm 111: 10)* And **St. Ephram the Syrian** says, [Brother, let the fear of God be in your heart, as a weapon in hand².]

c. **“They will be in pain as a woman in childbirth.” (Is, 13: 8)** They have inside them the fruit of evil, and will deliver its bitterness. It is strange that the Holy Bible likens the pains of the evil ones to the pains of labor, and likewise the pains of believers (John 16: 21). The formers cry out with fear and despair, as they would bring forth only wind (Is. 26: 18), while the others would rejoice amid the bangs of pain, *“for a human being has been born into the world”* (John 16: 20).

d. **“Their faces will be like flames,” (Is. 13: 8)** red with shame, because of their cowardice; and sometimes pale, because of their fear.

e. **“To lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it.” (Is. 13: 9)** As a symbol of all what would happen to the body (the earth), of loss of all true vitality.

Whoever opposes the Lord for the sake of carnal desires will lose even his body, and will have his inner soul destroyed; as it is said: **“Therefore I will shake the heavens (the soul), and the earth (the body) will move out of her place.” (Is. 13: 13)** He probably refers here to the anger of nature against whoever disobeys its Creator. As though, who disobeys the Lord will be disobeyed by nature itself!

f. **“The stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be darkened in its going forth. And the moon will not cause its light to shine.” (Is. 13: 10)** This refers to the darkness of ignorance that befalls whoever opposes the Lord. He would not see the light of all the stars including the sun and the moon. He would not see the Sun of righteousness, namely, faith in Christ, who is capable to grant him wisdom and knowledge. He would not see the light of the moon, namely, the life of the Church, enlightened by the Lord, being the moon that reflects the light of the sun. And would not enjoy the light of other stars, namely, the fellowship with the saints, who emit light as shining stars.

¹ Ep. To the fallen Theodore, 2.

² القمص سمعان السرياني: سيرة وأقوال مار أفرام السرياني، 1988، ص 123.

g. Men will be killed in war; and as women in Babylon were used to loosened life, so when they seek men to fulfill their ugly lusts, they are unable to find them. ***“I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold; a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir.” (Is. 13: 12)*** Ophir was probably located south east of Arabia, or somewhere on the western frontier of India. That may also refer to the scarcity of manpower because of war, together with the return of the captives, and the nations getting free of the Babylonian authority.

h. ***“It shall be as the hunted gazelle, and as a sheep that no man takes up. Every man will turn to his own people, and every one will flee to his own land.” (Is. 13: 14)*** A sign of loss of leadership and care; on the day of the defeat of Babylon, the army loses its leadership; so the mercenary forces from nations would return, each to his own land.

That would be the condition of a soul that is away from God. It would lose its inner leadership, so that man leads a life like a fugitive, or like sheep with no shepherd to keep together. He carries within himself bitter conflicts, a distracted mind, together with destroyed inner energies.

i. A total devastation for all, with no distinction between military and civil, man, woman, or child (Is. 13: 15). Here he portrays what Persia and Medes will do against Babylon. As they ***“do not regard silver, and do not delight in gold; their bows will dash the young men to pieces; and will have no pity on the fruit of the womb... And Babylon... will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.” (Is. 13: 17, 18, 10)***

j. ***“(Babylon) will never be inhabited, nor it will be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there, but wild beasts of the desert will be there.” (Is. 13: 20, 21)*** It will be desolate, its houses full of owls, ostriches, wild goats, hyenas, and jackals.

Abbot Serenius says, [We should not take these names lightly, as they refer to the beastly and fierce nature of the demons, symbolized by the wild beasts, though more evil¹.]

It is a portrait of the soul that submits to the evil one, to use for the kingdom of darkness to fill it with evil, and to convert it to a plant for corruption:

“Wild beasts of the desert will lie there” (Is. 13: 21) to be inhabited by violence, fierceness, and love of shedding innocent blood for no reason whatsoever.

“Their houses will be full of owls.” (Is. 13: 21) Most eastern peoples consider an owl’s voice as a bad omen. As though, nothing is to be heard within an evil man, except voices of despair and pessimism that reveal an inner void. ***“Ostriches will dwell there.” (Is. 13: 21)*** An ostrich is full of uncleanness (Leviticus 11: 16; Deuteronomy 14: 15); with mourning voice

¹ Cassian: Conf. 7:32.

(Micah 1: 8); lacking heavenly joy; of hard and cruel nature even toward its own eggs (Lamentations 4: 3); burying its head in the sand when a hunter approaches it. It was previously assumed that it does that because it thinks that the hunter would not see it; but it is now known that it is actually out of cowardice, to see itself falling a victim to hunters.

“Wild goats will caper there.” (Is. 13: 21) As these animals are only found in the wild places so also the demons will caper and have fun in the evil soul.

“The hyenas will howl in their citadels, and jackals in their pleasant palaces,” (Is. 13: 22) namely the palaces and temples will be transferred from pleasant places into a dwelling place for the wild beasts.

All that happened to Babylon, which was considered as **“the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’s pride,” (Is. 13: 19)** **“the golden city,”** (Is. 14: 4) **“the abundant in treasures”** (Jeremiah 51: 13), and **“the praise of the whole earth”** (Jeremiah 51: 41). It was likened to the golden head of the statue that was mentioned in the book of Daniel. Prophecies about it were literally realized. History states that Cyrus destroyed a great part of Babylon’s walls and buildings; and after 20 years, Darius destroyed what remained of them, and took away its brass gates, beside crucifying 3000 of its elite. It is claimed that the walls of Babylon were 60 miles long, 300 feet high, and 80 feet thick. They were wide enough for 6 chariots to go one beside the other over it¹. Its foundation went down 35 feet deep, to make it impossible for an enemy to dig a way beneath it. On the walls 250 watching towers were set, leading through them were 100 huge shining brass gates. Eventually Babylon transformed into ruins; Alexander the Great tried to restore its glory, but died before he could. Its stones were used in building Baghdad, and several of its public buildings.

Lastly, the prophet confirmed that what he said would be soon realized: **“Her days will not be prolonged.” (Is. 13: 22)** Babylon’s stars began to shine in the year 606 B.C.; to fall to Persia and Medes in 536 B.C.; while the prophecy came in the eighth century B.C.

Babylon remained a symbol of every soul, proud and rebellious, as, according to the book of revelation: **“In one hour (its) judgment has come.”** (Revelation 18: 10)

¹ Bultema, p. 158.

CHAPTER 14

THE FALL OF BABYLON

The prophet proceeds to talk about the chastisement of Babylon and other kingdoms, opposing the Lord and His people, to state that God's goal was not the fall of Babylon or other kingdoms, as much as granting comfort to His people, after having been chastised by captivity. He intended to confirm the realization of God's promises and covenants with His people, which were humiliated by Babylon.

God appeared as the leader of the battle against Babylon destined to destroy it, as it, with its arrogance and haughtiness, symbolized Satan, and its king, was an instrument in his hand, a representative and symbol of him.

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|--|---------------|
| 1. God's mercy upon His people | 1-3. |
| 2. Bad proverbs against the king of Babylon | 4-21. |
| 3. Destruction of Babylon | 22-23. |
| 4. Destruction of Assyria | 24-27. |
| 5. Destruction of Philistine | 28-32. |

1. GOD'S MERCY UPON HIS PEOPLE

God, who allowed for the humiliation of His people by the Babylonian captivity, He Himself is the merciful God, who has chosen them to be His own (Is. 14: 1). He previously took them out of the land of Egypt, set them free from the servitude of Pharaoh, and brought them to the Promised Land with a mighty arm. Here, He is realizing another exodus, as He liberates them from captivity, brings them back home, neither empty-handed nor weak, but in strength, drawing to them strangers to join them and share their faith and worship. He also grants His people the power to *"take them captive, whose captives they were, and rule over their oppressors... The Lord gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve."* (Is. 14: 1, 2, 3)

St. John Cassian believes that what happened to that people, is a symbol of what occurs to a believer, who receives the "Word of God," Who is able to walk before him, and to set him free from "the evil desires" that captivates his body, within the prison bars of sins, and isolates him from the hidden knowledge¹.

We are in need of the continuous work of God, to liberate us, not from the servitude of Pharaoh, nor from the captivity of Babylon, but to set us free, through the cross, by His Holy

¹ *Institutions*, 5:2.

Spirit, from the captivity of sin; to set us forth from darkness to light, to live in the freedom of glory of the children of God.

This magnificent portrait of God's love toward His believers is strongly proclaimed in Baptism, where man casts off the garments of servitude and captivity, proclaims that he denies the devil with all his hosts, and rejects his inner bondage; then receives the holy ointment, to carry the splendor of Spirit in him. He descends into the water of Baptism, to enjoy fellowship in the body of Christ, to be able to live the new life, that overcomes death and darkness, and to praise God saying, "*In Your light, O, Lord, we see light.*" (Psalm 36: 9)

❖ God anoints your features, and seals them with the sign of the Cross. By that, God reins back all the madness of the devil, who does not dare to look at your faces; he would get blinded as though he is looking at the glare of the sun.

Be sure that it is God Himself who anoints you through the hand of the priest. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul saying that God abides you in Christ who anointed us.

After the priest anoints all your members with this oil, you become secure, capable of overcoming the serpent with no harm.

❖ In the complete darkness of the night, the priest casts away your garment, as though he is leading you into heaven through that office; anoints all your body with olive oil of the Spirit, in order to strengthen your members against the arrows of the enemy¹.

St. John Chrysostom

2. BAD PROVERBS AGAINST THE KING OF BABYLON

The prophet, in the name of the people, liberated from the authority of Babylon, utters bad proverbs against its king, describing him as:

a. "***The oppressor***" (Is. 14: 4): If Babylon was called the golden city because of its great richness that was realized through the oppression and arrogance of its king, that oppression will not hold, and that arrogance will be broken. "***How the oppressor has ceased... The Lord has broken the rod of the wicked. The scepter of the rulers.***" (Is. 14: 4)

In every age, there are oppressors who arrogantly oppose the truth, and afflict the pious of the Lord. Yet oppression will come to an end, and the oppressed will overcome. That happened in the days of **St. John Chrysostom**, when Eutropius cancelled the right of the Church to protect those taking refuge in it. Because of his misconduct and abuse of his authority, the army rebelled against him and sought his execution. And when he took refuge in the cathedral, next to his palace, headed to the altar and took hold of its corns, **St. John Chrysostom** refrained from

¹ Whitaker: *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 37, 40.

avenging himself nor the Church, proclaiming his mercy and love even toward the enemies¹. It ended up that Eutropius escaped from the church to be executed by sword in Chalcedon. In his second homily concerning that episode, the saint revealed the weakness of all oppressions against the children of God:

[Whoever wants to cast me away, to hate me, or even to have me stoned, let him do that. The actions of the enemies against me are my supports to gain the crown of conquest.

The number of my rewards will depend on that of my wounds. That is why I do not fear the plots of enemies. But I fear one thing: the sin! If no one is able to make me sin, let the whole world make war against me. This war would make me more glorious. Let me give you a lesson: Do not fear the deceits of those in authority, but fear the authority of sin. Nobody will harm you, if you do not harm yourself.

If you do not do wrong, even if you are threatened by thousands of swords, God will protect you from them. But if you do wrong, even if you are inside Paradise, you will get expelled from it.]

b. ***“He who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke.” (Is. 14: 6)*** He kept on striking; that is why God broke his rod. He kept on persecuting nations, and confiscating their freedom, so he was worthy of falling into humiliation, and as is said: *“As you have done, it shall be done to you.”* (Obadiah 15) Because of that, when Babylon fell, ***“The whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing.” (Is. 14: 7)*** And to Jacob it was said: ***“It shall come to pass in the day the Lord gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve.” (Is. 14: 3)*** This rest was partly realized by the return of the people from captivity. Yet *“there remains a rest for the people of God,” (Hebrew 4: 9)* which is the entrance into the new life in Christ Jesus, being *“our true Sabbath”* and *“our eternal rest.”*

Those believing in the concept of the “Millennium Kingdom” try to interpret this *rest* as being the enjoyment of these thousand years of government, under a material authority of Christ on earth². He who tasted the **rest of Christ** and the comforts of the Holy Spirit truly realizes how he has achieved an exalted rest in this world, as a sort of the pledge of the heavenly rest.

❖ All humans have seen how God has betrothed our nature. The devil saw that and retreated, saw the pledge and withdrew in terror; saw the garments of the apostles and escaped (Acts 19: 11). How great is the power of the Holy Spirit!

Look at what the Holy Spirit did when He found the earth filled with demons, He turned it into heaven.

¹ للمؤلف: الكنيسة تحبك، للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1968 المقدمة.

² Bultema, ch. 14.

St John Chrysostom¹

The Fathers apprehended that the enjoyment of Baptism as an entrance into rest, and a taste of a life in Paradise:

- ❖ There you are in the front hall of the palace. You will be soon escorted to the presence of the King.²
- ❖ Paradise will soon be opened to every one of you³.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

By the fall of Babylon, *“Indeed the cypress trees rejoiced; and the cedars of Lebanon saying, ‘since you were cut down, no woodsman has come up against us,’”* (Is. 14: 8) meaning that since you were put in the grave, no hand has extended to hurt us. Enemies used to cut down trees during war, to spite the countries that they conquer, besides using them as fuel and for construction, as did Nebuchadnezzar.

The Lord Christ had gone to sleep on the cross in flesh. Yet it was the devil whose power was destroyed, and whose authority was crucified. By the cross we became free from the bondage of the devil, capable of treading on his power beneath our feet. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Do not fear the devil, even if he is a spirit with no body; nothing is weaker than him⁴.]

It did not stop at the kings mocking the king of Babylon. The prophet portrayed him going down the abyss, to be received by the kings and elite of the earth, probably those he had previously persecuted, getting up from their thrones, not out of respect, but to invite him in ridicule, to sit in their places as he did on earth, addressing him mockingly: *“Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us?”* (Is. 14: 10) We thought of you as the eternal god you claimed to be. We did not imagine that you might die in humility as we did!

“Your pomp is brought down to Sheol (the grave). And the sound of your stringed instruments; the maggots are spread out under you, and worms cover you.” (Is. 14: 11) You used to lie on silk, and to smell of sweet fragrance; how come that you have descended to the abyss; to lie on maggots, and to get covered by worms?

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation, on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.” (Is. 14: 12 - 14)

¹ On Eutropius, hom. 2.

² PG. 33:333A.

³ PG. 33:357A

⁴ هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، ص62.

You likened the devil, your master, who has once been a prominent star among the heavenly host “*son of the morning*,” then became haughty toward God his Creator; and thought that he could exalt his throne over that of God Himself; So he fell to turn into darkness instead of light, as he isolated himself from the Source of light. You wanted to sit on the mount of Zion (Psalm 48: 2), the sacred mountain of God. You thought that you are like God in greatness, so you exalted yourself above the clouds!

That was the reason why the king of Babylon perished. His falling into pride, and his haughtiness, not only toward those kings around him, but also toward God Himself turned him into an instrument of the devil. He bore his mark “the pride,” that was the sin of our fore-parents when they were in the Garden, and likewise the sin of the king of Tyre, who became a symbol of the devil (Ezekiel 28: 12 - 16). He also bore the mark of the “antichrist,” or the “man of sin, of whom it is said, “*...the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*” (2 Thessalonians 2: 3, 4).

St. John Cassian says, [The pride of heart was enough in itself to cast from heaven to earth, such a great and capable power. The fall of the great devil, warns us to be cautious, being surrounded by the weakness of flesh on all sides...

He got so haughty to assume that he was in no more need of divine support, to stay pure as he was; and thought of himself to be like God. He leaned upon the strength of his own will to provide himself with every thing necessary, for the realization of virtue and for the continuation of complete blessing. That thought alone has been the reason of his fall¹.]

[Thus, as God the Creator, and the Physician of all, knows that pride is the origin and head of all evils, He is keen on healing the thing with its opposite; what perished through pride, is to be cured through humility... One says, “***I will be like the Most High***” (Is. 14: 14); while the Other, “*being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a Servant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a Man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death of the cross.*” (Philippians 2: 6 - 8) One says, “***I will exalt my throne above the stars of God***” (Is. 14: 13); while the other says, “*Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart*” (Matthew 11: 29). One says, “*My river is my own; I have made it for myself*” (Ezekiel 90: 3); while the other says, “*I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me.*” (John 5: 30; 14: 10)²]

St. Ephram the Syrian says, [In a man of humility, the Spirit of wisdom finds rest.] [If you seem, in the eyes of your brothers like pure gold, you should rather consider yourself as a pot

¹ *Institutions 12:4.*

² *Ibid 12:8.*

that nobody needs; thus you can save yourself from pride, hated by both God and men.] [A man of pride is like a tree, although nice and tall, yet fruitless... A man of envy is like a fruit, although nice looking from outside, yet corrupt inside¹.]

Pride leads man to the abyss; that is why the prophet says to the king of Babylon: **“You shall be brought down to Sheol; to the lowest depth of the Pit” (Is. 14: 15)** You have fallen from the top of the mountain of your dreams, and descended from the clouds of your imagination, to live in the abyss with the devil, your master.

Where is your might, you, **“who made the earth tremble; who shook kingdoms; who made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed its cities” (Is. 14: 16, 17)?**

Where is your glory? All the kings of the earth died in dignity, even those whom you humiliated and tortured; died in their homes, their souls were prayed upon, and the bodies of some of them were even mummified. As for you, **“You are cast out of your grave like an abominable branch, like the garments of those who are slain... like a corpse trodden under foot.” (Is. 14: 19)**

This prophecy refers to how king Belshazzar was slain, the night the Medes entered Babylon, when nobody paid any attention to his corpse amid the destruction that came to the city.

He lost everything, even his people and children (Is. 14: 20, 21), because of the pride of his heart.

3. DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

Because of pride, God took away from Babylon its name; **“None shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever” (Jeremiah 51; 62)**, to be an example before the whole world, **“I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and marshes of muddy water” (Is. 14: 23)**

Certain scholars believe that the **porcupine** here is not that animal known for the long spines covering its body, but a kind of birds that dwell in desolate places. They base their view on the fact that the spiny porcupine does not inhabit ‘marshes of muddy water.’ Those against this view, say that desolation will leave the country with one part, of marshes of muddy water, and the other, a habitat for the porcupine. Anyway, that great royal city will turn into a dwelling place for either animals or birds of desolate places, and counted as unclean, needing to be wiped out by the broom of destruction to get rid it of its uncleanness, and to protect the surroundings against corruption.

4. DESTRUCTION OF ASSYRIA

The prophet mentions what would happen to Assyria and Philistine, to confirm to his

¹ القمص سمعان السرياني: سيرة وأقوال مار أفرام السرياني، 1988، ص 132-133.

hearers that his prophecy concerning Babylon, that is to take place 200 years later, will be realized.

Assyria had unwarrantedly invaded the land of Judah, and blasphemed against God. So God will allow it to enter Judah and its mountains, belonging to God; to get destroyed in the same holy places he had defiled (Is. 14: 24, 25); in order to make of Assyria an example before all nations, that could think of doing the same (Is. 14: 26).

God reveals His plan to chastise the evildoers, namely to let them consummate their evil will with complete freedom; then to get, as the fruit of their evil - corruption and destruction. It is as though, sin carries within it its punishment; the same way, the holy life in the Lord carries within itself its glory. That is why it is said: ***“The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, ‘Surely as I have thought, so it shall come to pass; And as I have purposed, so it shall stand’”*** (Is. 14: 24)

5. DESTRUCTION OF PHILISTINE

In the year when king Ahaz died, came this prophecy: ***“Do not rejoice, all you of Philistia, because the rod that struck you is broken. For out of the serpent’s roots will come forth a viper, and its offsprings will be a fiery flying serpent.”*** (Is. 14: 28)

Philistine at that time, was formed of several principalities; that is why he addresses it as ***“all of Philistia.”*** He asks her not to rejoice because the rod that struck her is broken. Some believe that that rod was Tiglath-Pileser who took over some cities of Philistia, and died one or two years before Ahaz, to be followed by Shalmaneser, Sargon, and Sennacherib, who were all worse than he was.

Yet, most scholars believe that the broken rod is Uzziah, who cruelly struck the Philistines, who rejoiced for his death (2 Chronicles 26: 6). The *‘serpent’s root’* is the house of David, out of which comes Hezekiah, who struck them, more cruelly than his grandfather and subdued them (2 Kings 18: 8).

As to the ***‘fiery flying serpent,’*** it is like that one raised by Moses in the wilderness, that symbolizes the Person of the Lord Christ, crucified on the cross, who bears in His body the poison of our transgressions, to nullify it by His life-giving death. Thus, the prophet moves from the salvation of God’s people from their human enemies, to their eternal salvation from the devil through the cross.

The prophet proclaims that Philistine would suffer a devastating famine (Is. 14: 30), and a destructive war, that would turn their cities into smoke, while finally God would protect His people, and would have compassion on their poor (Is. 14: 32).

God - in His goodness - does not stop evil, and does not compel evildoers to repent, but, finally He consummates His plan of salvation for those who lean upon Him, turning everything to their edification.

CHAPTER 15

A PROPHECY AGAINST MOAB

The prophet Isaiah presents prophecies concerning certain nations that surround Judah and Israel, that would be soon realized, in order to confirm to the people two things:

- ❖ The truth of the prophecies of the prophet, concerning the distant future, as the captivity, the return from it, the coming of the Messiah, and His redemptive works.
- ❖ That is besides confirming that God is the Lord of the whole world, the Almighty, and the Controller of nations.

In this chapter, the prophet prophesies the utter destruction of Moab, by the hand of Esarhaddon or Sennacherib, for which the heart of the prophet cried out, longing for their return to God, and for their salvation, rather than that cruel destiny, caused by their denial of faith.

- 1. Prompt realization of the prophecy** **1.**
- 2. Destruction of the great cities** **2-5.**
- 3. Occurrence of a famine** **6-9.**

1. PROMPT REALIZATION OF THE PROPHECY

“The burden against Moab:

Because in the night ‘Ar’ of Moab is laid waste and destroyed, because in the night ‘Kir’ of Moab is laid waste and destroyed.” (Is. 15: 1)

The Moabites were descendants of Lot, so they were related to Israel. They inhabited the region east of the Dead Sea. Their country was formed of two sections: Moab, and the plains of Moab, and that were within the valley of the Jordan facing Jericho. The children of Reuben allowed the Moabites to dwell in their cities, and took after them the worship of the god Chemosh. Good relations were sometimes there, between Moab and Israel; There Naomi went to sojourn, and came back with Ruth. And when Saul persecuted David, the later left his parents with the king of Moab. Despite that, the Moabites harbored a spirit of animosity toward Israel and Judah. They often joined forces with neighboring nations against them.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied the destruction of the great cities of Moab, a prophecy that was literally and accurately realized, within three years of its proclamation (Is. 16: 14), by the hands of the king of Assyria, in a sudden and an unexpected way.

‘Ar’ is a Semitic name, meaning “city” also called ‘Aroer’ (Deuteronomy 2: 36), was 14 miles south of the river ‘Arnon.’ **St. Jerome** calls it ‘Areopolis,’ and ‘Rabbath Moab,’ i.e. great

Moab. The site is still called 'Rabba' on the Roman road.

'Kir' is a Semitic name, meaning "wall," or "a walled city," 11 miles east of the southern part of the Dead Sea. It is an Armenian region subject to Assyria, Kurgistan or Georgia between the Black and Caspian seas (Isa 22:6). The river Kur (Cyrus) in it falls into the Caspian Sea. From Kir the Syrians migrated originally; and to it they were removed from Damascus by Tiglath Pileser (2 Kings 16:9). Keil thinks Kir to be Kurena along the river Mardus in Media, or else Karine a town in Media, on the ground that the remote parts of Armenia were beyond the Assyrian empire (2 Kings 19:37); but Esarhaddon subdued it¹.

The two cities Ar and Kir were destroyed in one night, not in one day. Whenever the Sun of righteousness sets on the human soul, that likens a great walled city, it would be overcome by the darkness of ignorance and evil, and would lose all that it labored for, during the long years. That is why the apostle Paul says, "*You are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night*" (1 Thessalonians 5: 5, 6)

- ❖ Who likens him who watches and prays in his secret place, surrounded by a hallow of light amid the outer darkness? As to the evil one, who walks as a son of darkness, he stands in the light of the day, yet, although surrounded by light from outside, he is filled with darkness within.

Dear brothers, I wish that we are not deceived but be watchful. He who does not watch in righteousness, his watchfulness is not counted for him!²

St. Ephram the Syrian

- ❖ As man forsakes the love of the dark world he becomes pure through the work of the Holy Spirit, and through his attachment to the true purity... the soul shines, and becomes itself light, according to the promise of the Lord (Matthew 13: 43)³.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

2. DESTRUCTION OF THE GREAT CITIES

The prophet Isaiah portrays what happens to the great cities of Moab, beside Ar and Kir.

"He (Moab) has gone up to the temple (House, Bajith) and Dibon, to the high places to weep." (Is. 15: 2) As desolation came to Moab, many people sought refuge with the pagan gods, crying out with tears, hoping that they would rescue them, but in vain. In a similar way to what the prophets and priests of Baal have done in the days of Elijah.

¹ Fausset's Bible Dictionary.

² On Nativity, hymn 1.

³ On Virginity 11.

They went to the *'Bajith,'* interpreted as the 'temple' by some, or "*bayt*" that is the house of the god Chemosh or the god's temple, or "bat" meaning "girl" or "daughter," that is "the daughter of the city" or its inhabitants¹.

Dibon, a Moabite name meaning 'heights,' or 'washing,' is a city three miles north of the river Arnon, northwest of 'Aroer,' called *'El-Dheib,'* or *'Daibon,'* where the height of the Moabite god Chemosh is found.

Some scholars interpret *'Bajith'* and *'Dibon,'* as house of Dibon or daughter of Dibon, as though the Moabites have gone to take refuge in the temple, or house of the god Chemosh, weeping and wailing for what had become of them.

"Moab will wail over 'Nebo' and over 'Medeba.'" (Is. 15: 2)

Nebo was destroyed; close to the great mountain of Nebo, east of the Jordan, at the south end of the Dead Sea, the mountain to which the prophet Moses ascended to look from afar to the Promised Land, his soul rejoicing, yearning to cross over to the land of the living, to enjoy the heavenly Canaan. At that spot he died (Deuteronomy 34). 'Nebo,' fortified by the great mountain, has been a defense center for the Moabites, but it was lost and destroyed, to turn into an object for wailing. At the same spot, where Moses rejoiced, the Moabites wailed. What causes the believer's heart to rejoice, would demolish the soul of the unbeliever!

They also wailed over Medeba, the Hebrew means "waters of quiet," or "gently flowing water." It was so called as it includes a lake at its south whose length and width are 360 feet, and several others at the north and east.

Medeba was a source of conflict between Moab and Israel. Apparently the Ammonites controlled the city in the time of David; for the Syrian mercenaries, allies of the Ammonites, "encamped before Medeba" (1 Chron 19:7) before their defeat by Joab, the captain of David's army. In Ahaz' time Medeba was a sanctuary of Moab.

Medeba, now known as Madeba or Madiyabah, 5 miles to the south east of Nebo, 14 miles east of the Sea of Lot. It is on the King's Highway, the main north-south highway through Transjordan².

***"On all their heads will be baldness; and every beard cut off. In their streets they will clothe themselves with sackcloth. On the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one will wail, weeping bitterly."* (Is. 15: 2, 3)** All these were signs of great sorrow (Jeremiah 48: 37; 2 Samuel 3: 31; Jeremiah 4: 8; 41: 5; Lamentations 2: 10). Baldness refers to humiliation, as the conquerors used to cut the hair of male and female captives. Cutting the beards of priests refers to their loss of spiritual authority and dignity. Clothing with sackcloth refers to deep despair; as to crying and wailing, that mean loss of inner joy.

¹ cf. R.E. Clements: *The New Century Bible Commentary, Isaiah 1-39, 1987, p. 152.*

² *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Thomas Nelson Publishers.*

This is the portrait of the soul that denies its God, to get captivated by the evil enemy; It loses its freedom, beauty, authority, dignity, and joy, to liken an ugly, humble and broken nation; that finds no rest, neither in streets nor on the roof, where pagans used to place their gods; wherever it goes it finds no rest.

“Heshbon and Elealeh will cry out, their voice shall be heard as far as Jahaz. Therefore the armed soldiers of Moab will cry out. His life will be burdensome to him.” (Is. 15: 4). The Moabites escaped from one city to another; their wailing was heard from afar. Heshbon, a Moabite name that means ‘ordinance,’ or ‘stronghold’ was the capital of Sihon king of the Amorites, the Moabites took it over from the tribe of Levi (Joshua 21; 1 Chronicles 6: 81), known nowadays as Hesban, situated in Transjordan about 50 miles east of Jerusalem and approximately 14 miles southwest of modern Amman, Jordan’

‘Elealeh,’ a Hebrew name, that probably means ‘God ascended.’ It is located in the east of Jordan, in the portion of Reuben (Num 32:3,37). Appropriated by Moab, and named as a Moabite town by Isaiah (Isa 15:4; 16:9; Jer 48:34) along with Heshbon. Now El-A'al, ‘the high,’ a mile north of Heshbon, commanding a wide view of the plain and southern Belka¹.

The two cities at the far north were object of conflict between Israel and Moab.

‘Jahaz,’ a Hebrew name, meaning a ‘trampled on place,’ known nowadays as Belka, is 10 or 12 miles south of Heshbon.

The prophet could not help feeling sad for what came to happen to these great cities, to say, ***“My heart will cry out for Moab.” (Is. 15: 5)*** He shared the bitterness of his enemies, yearning for them to forsake their animosity and enjoy salvation. That is how men of God should be filled with inner true love, and deep longing even for the salvation of their oppressors!

❖ If he was not evil, he would not be your enemy. Therefore, wish him good, to make him forsake his evil and animosity. He is an enemy, not because of his human nature, but because of his sin!²

St. Augustine

❖ Our prayers for our friends are not as useful as if they are for our enemies... If we pray for our friends we shall not be better than tax collectors. But if we pray for and loved our enemies we would liken God in His love for mankind³.

St. John Chrysostom

The prophet says, ***“My heart will cry out for Moab. His fugitives shall flee to Zoar, like a three-year-old heifer. For by the ascent of Luhith, they will go up with weeping. For in the***

¹ Fausset's Bible Dictionary, Electronic Database.

² Ser. On N.T. Lessons 6:9.

³ المطران أبيفانيوس: الأمانى الذهبية من مقالات إكليل القديسين يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1972، ص 49.

way of Horonaim, they will raise up a cry of destruction.” (Is. 15: 5) The word “fugitive” in Hebrew came in the single form; as though the prophet is portraying to us, the fugitives from far north to Zoar in the south - that small town where Lot took refuge when Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt - as to liken one 3-year-old heifer, that escaped as though from a heavy yoke it was not used to carry. They became like one person who had no one to support or to comfort, escaping to small places Zoar, to find no refuge.

Zoar: Many scholars believe the site of Zoar to be esSafi, at the foot of the mountains of Moab, about 4.5 miles up the River Zered from where it empties into the Dead Sea. Tradition has placed Zoar at the southeastern end of the Dead Sea. The original site may now be covered with water¹.

As to Luhith and Horonaim their locations are not known, but most probably not far from Zoar.

3. OCCURRENCE OF A FAMINE

It does not stop at the destruction of great cities, bitter defeat, wailing and escape, but a famine is to come over Moab, as a natural consequence of defeat in war, and of destruction of natural and human resources; or probably as a sign that nature itself is turning against them. The prophet says, *“For the waters of Nimrim will be desolate. For the green grass has withered away. The grass fails, there is nothing green. Therefore the abundance they have gained, and what they have laid up, they will carry away to the brook of the willows.” (Is. 15: 6, 7)*

‘Nimrim’ is the plural of Nimrah, a name means ‘leopard,’ or ‘clear water’ of springs in the valley of Nimira, on the beach, south east of the Red Sea. The name is from leopards infesting the thick wood between the inner and outer banks of the Jordan, which overflows at times into that intermediate space and drives the wild beast out of its lair (Jeremiah 49:19; 50:44)². Some scholars state that the meaning here, is that the multitudes of fugitives would be so enormous, that the oasis would not be wide enough to accommodate them together with their animals; so they will have to leave their cattle, and to take only what they can carry of their treasures, hoping to go on their way in the best way possible. But they couldn’t take all their needs³, some scholars see that in spite of the famine their country suffered from, their enemies have confiscated all their possessions and carried it to their countries to leave Moab void of everything.

‘Eglaim’ means "two ponds". Same as Eneglaim, which means ‘fountain of two calves.’ On the extreme boundary of Moab (Isa 15:8), over against Engedi, near where Jordan enters the

¹ Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² Fausset's Bible Dictionary, Electronic Database.

³ New International Comm, on the O.T., Isaiah 1-39, p. 338-9.

Dead Sea¹.

All Moab turned into a place for crying and wailing, heard in the south in the valley of Nimira, up to Eglaim, near Kir and Beer elim in the north, and “*The waters of Dimon will be full of blood*” (Is. 15: 9), because of enormous bloodshed on that famed night [Dimon or Dibon mean blood; he probably means the waters of the river Arnon]; no one will find water to quench his thirst.

The remnants to escape would be in a condition of terror, as though confronting a fierce lion, from which there is no escape (Is. 15: 9).

In short, Moab would lose, beside its great cities, its fields, waters, and peace, to become completely desolate.

¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 16

MOAB SUBMITTING TO JUDAH

In the days of Hezekiah, the prophet Isaiah gave counsel to Moab to fulfill the tax it promised to pay Judah, in the form of lambs, as Moab was known for its livestock (Numbers 32: 4). Moab, later on, also gave similar taxes to Israel (2 Kings 3: 4). Abiding to that counsel, Moab would enjoy protection, instead of becoming like *“a wandering bird thrown out of the nest”* (Is. 16: 2). Fearing that Moab may reject his counsel, Isaiah revealed to it its fatal wounds, that is ‘pride.’

This is an invitation offered to every soul to submit to the Lord Christ, the King coming out of the tribe of Judah, to present its life as a sacrificed lamb, for the sake of the Lord, in order to enjoy inner peace, instead of getting destroyed by denial of faith and by pride.

1. A counsel to Moab to submit to Judah 1-5.

2. Pride, the destroyer of man 6.

3. Wailing for Moab 7-14.

1. A COUNSEL TO SUBMIT TO JUDAH

We have already seen how the heart of Isaiah was moved in great compassion toward Moab, making him wail for their sake. Now, he is offering them a good counsel to mend their ways, to enjoy good relations with Judah, and to enjoy peace and protection, through giving the taxes (lambs) to king Hezekiah. This is a symbol of the invitation to nations to submit to the Lord Christ, the Lion coming out of the tribe of Judah; as there would be neither peace nor eternal life without receiving Him as a King in our inner life.

At the end of the previous chapter, it was said: *“Lions upon him who escapes from Moab; and on the remnant of the land”* (Is. 15: 9). That lion might be Hezekiah or, according to others, the Lord Christ, the Lion coming out of the tribe of Judah, to reign spiritually over nations¹.

The prophet himself offers to intercede on behalf of Moab, if they are ready to pay their taxes: *“Send the lamb to the ruler of the land, from Sela to the wilderness, to the mount of the daughter of Zion. For it shall be as a wandering bird thrown out of the nest. So shall be the daughters of Moab at the fords of Arnon.”* (Is. 16: 1, 2)

‘Sela,’ is a Hebrew name that means ‘rock,’ called by the Greeks ‘Petra,’ having the same meaning.

¹ Cf. Bultema, p. 177.

Josephus¹ tells us that among the kings of the Midianites who fell before Moses was one Rekem, king of Rekem (akre, or rekeme), the city deriving its name from its founder. This he says was the Arabic name; the Greeks called it Petra. Eusebius, Onomasticon says Petra is a city of Arabia in the land of Edom. It is called Jechthoel; but the Syrians call it Rekem. Jokteel, as we have seen, must be sought elsewhere. There can be no doubt that Josephus intended the city in Wady Musa².

It has been a fortified location on the top of a mountain in the land of Edom, to which the Edomites used to take refuge in case of emergency; as a strong undefeatable natural castle, known nowadays as Emm-El-Biara.

Amaziah had subjected it (2 Kings 14:7). The emperor Hadrian named it Hadriana, as appears from a coin.

It is as though the prophet is inviting the Moabites, who took refuge in Edom, and got fortified in Sela, to join the rest of their countrymen in the wilderness, in submission to Judah, and in sending lambs to Jerusalem ‘the mount of the daughter of Zion.’

It is an invitation to every man to refrain from leaning on natural fortifications or on human arm as refuge. His peace lies in his heading to Jerusalem, to submit his life as a sacrifice of love to the Son of David, the Lion coming out of the tribe of Judah. The Lion came as a Lamb, to be crucified out of Jerusalem, so that we, as lambs - living sacrifices - would partake of His passions to enter into His heavenly Jerusalem.

❖ *“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.”* (Romans 12: 1)

It may be said: How could a body become a sacrifice? Let the eye refrain from seeing evil, to become a sacrifice! Let the tongue refrain from uttering uncleanness, to become a sacrifice! Let the hand refrain from committing a sinful act, to become a complete burnt offering... By that, we are in no need of a knife, an altar, or fire. We would rather need all those, yet not made by hand, to come to us from above. We need an exalted knife and fire on an altar heaven wide.

If Elijah had offered a visible sacrifice, to be consumed together with all water, wood and stones, by a fire that came down from above, what would it be for you?³

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Bring along your offerings... offerings of your soul!⁴

St. Jerome

¹ *Ant, IV, vii, 1.*

² *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database.*

³ *In Rom, hom 20.*

⁴ *On Ps, hom, 23.*

Outside of the Lord Christ, the prophet sees the daughters of Moab crossing the river Arnon, as wandering birds, thrown out of the nest, or as scattered chickens, lacking the warmth and protection of wings (Is. 16: 2). Yet through receiving Him, we get underneath the wings of His cross, to find our comfort, peace, and our inner satisfaction.

Likewise, the prophet offers a counsel to the elders of Judah, asking them to receive the outcasts of Moab who come to take refuge in their midst; to give them ***“shadow like the night in the middle of the day. Do not to betray him who escapes... Be a shelter to them from the face of the spoiler.”*** (Is. 16: 3, 4)

It is fitting for the men of Judah to bear a symbol of the Lord Christ, the true refuge, in opening their hearts and cities to the refugees, in receiving them with no betray. That would proclaim the kingdom of Christ, established eternally upon the throne of mercy:

“In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.” (Is. 16: 5)

Thus the prophet presents to us a Messianic text, proclaiming that the Church - the tabernacle of David - is the refuge, where the Messiah reigns, to draw the nations to Him, to find in Him the truth, to enjoy divine mercies, and to sing with the Psalmist: *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your thron.; Mercy and truth go before Your face... For our shield belongs to the Lord, and our King to the Holy One of Israel.”* (Psalm 89: 14, 18)

2. PRIDE, THE DESTROYER OF MAN

The prophet Isaiah offered good counsel to Moab, as did the prophet Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4: 27). Yet, he revealed at the same time their spiritual weakness - their pride - as a probable hindrance against receiving his counsel: ***“We have heard of the pride of Moab - he is very proud... of his haughtiness and his pride and his wrath.”*** (Is. 16: 5) The prophet heard of the Moabite’s boasting and exceeding pride and empty words. Pride is a destroyer of man as well as of nations, depriving man of receiving good counsel, and enjoyment of God’s grace and mercy.

3. WAILING FOR MOAB

The leaders of Moab did not listen to the voice of Isaiah, because of their pride and conceit; that is why they fell under bitter punishments, and deserved what would befall them, of which are the following:

a. Occurrence of total wailing: ***“Therefore Moab shall wail for Moab. Everyone shall wail”*** (Is. 16: 7)

b. Wailing covered the largest cities of Moab, like Kir Hareseth (Is. 16: 7), that was stricken; beside the fields that withered, like those of Heshbon and the vine of Sibmeh and Jazer

(Is. 16: 8, 9); Covered both cities and villages, literate and illiterates, rich and poor, etc. Heshbon, Sibmeh, and Jazer, were well famed for their rich vines.

c. The feasts of harvest turned into weeping and mourning. In place of the joyful shouting of the feast, bitter shouting of battle was heard (Is. 16: 10).

d. The Moabites set forth to the high places, to pray to the god Chemosh, but with no avail (Is. 16: 12).

e. ***“But now the Lord has spoken, saying, ‘Within three years... the glory of Moab will be despised with all that great multitude, and the remnant will be very small and feeble.’” (Is. 16: 14)***

That will occur on the hands of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. And such would be the destiny of a proud man. He would be like Moab, wailing would prevail over his life as a whole, in all aspects, large and small; would lose inner joy and gladness of the heart; his feasts would turn into sorrow; his worship would be of no avail; would collapse day after day to lose his glory completely.

Yet, amid that dark portrait, the prophet Isaiah reveals two impressive joyful sides:

The first is his partaking of the troubles of Moab, even though the fruit of their sins, saying, ***“My heart shall resound like a harp for Moab, and my inner being for Kir Heres.” (Is. 16: 11)***

The second side is the presence of very small and feeble remnant (Is. 16: 14). In the past, the Moabite Ruth enjoyed salvation, having come to seek refuge under the shadow of God. And in the New Testament the Gentiles came into faith to enjoy the new life in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER 17

A PROPHECY CONCERNING DAMASCUS AND EPHRAIM

God has no partiality, if He would chastise the pagan nations like Moab for their denial of faith and haughtiness and blasphemy against Him, He is doing the same to Israel (or Ephraim, the ten tribes), because of its alliance with Aram or Syria (its capital Damascus) against Judah, leaning on the Pharaoh of Egypt against Assyria. That is why God allowed the king of Assyria to attack and overcome Aram and Ephraim in no time.

There were relationships between Damascus and Israel since old times. Abraham, from whom Israel descended, placed his entire household in the hands of his servant Eliezer of Damascus. In the days of the prophet Elisha, Naaman the Syrian came to be cured of his leprosy in the waters of the river Jordan; the Canaanite woman came to ask the Lord Christ to heal her daughter; the apostles of Christ preached in Damascus; and the Lord Christ appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

1. Destruction of Damascus 1-2.

2. Defeat of Ephraim 3-11.

3. The enemies' attacks 12-13.

1. DESTRUCTION OF DAMASCUS

Damascus is considered one of the most prominent ancient cities, mentioned since the days of Abraham (Genesis 14: 15); invaded by king David, who put a garrison in it (2 Samuel 8: 5, 6; 1 Chronicles 18: 5, 6). Rezin could establish a Syrian kingdom to make war with Israel for a long time, followed later by an alliance against Judah and Assyria. It has been defeated several times. In the year 843 B.C. Damascus was attacked by Shalmaneser, who defeated its king Hazael, and by Tiglath-Pileser in the year 732 B.C., who killed its king Rezin, and led its people to captivity (2 Kings 16: 5.9; Isaiah 7: 1.8; Amos 1: 3.5). It changed hands, afterwards, from the Assyrians to the Chaldeans, to the Persians, to the Greeks, then to the Romans in the year 64 B.C., to become a Roman province.

If Damascus joined forces with Ephraim against Judah, God punished them together. Both of them represent the evil forces of the world, opponents of the truth, as came in the book of Revelation: *“Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give Him glory.”*

(Revelation 16: 8, 9)

“Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap. The cities of Aroer are forsaken; They will be for flocks which lie down, and no one will make them afraid” (Is. 17: 1, 2)

There were at least three cities by the name of Aroer, a Moabite name meaning ‘naked, or nakedness.’ A city in Moab that exists nowadays under the name Araer, twelve miles east of the Dead Sea, a little south of Diban, north of the river Arnon. Then, a village in the southern part of Judea (1 Samuel 30: 28), called nowadays Araara, twelve miles south east of Beer-Sheba; And a third one in Gilead, close to Rabba or Rabbat-Ammon¹ (Joshua 30; Judges 11: 33). Nowadays, Amman is the capital of the kingdom of Jordan.

Damascus and Aroer represent the soul, haughty against God, allied with others against His Church, which, although God leave for sometime to appear strong, successful, and flourishing, yet, it ends up collapsing on two aspects:

a. To be transformed from a great city to a ruinous heap; namely, to lose its life, being isolated from God Himself, the Source of life.

b. To be transformed, like Aroer, from a dwelling place for people (with God), to a pasture for flocks and cattle. As though our opposition to the truth, would lead us to lose our dignity, and would transform our life into a playground for every animal, to end up carrying the carnal animal nature. That is why **St. Ephram the Syrian** praises the Babe of the manger, saying, [Glory be to Him, who, finding that we likened the beasts in nature and greed, descended to become one with us, to transform us to heavenlies².]

2. DEFEAT OF EPHRAIM

As Damascus has been the chief player in the venture of alliance against Judah, it was worthy of the first punishment, to be followed by Israel, who, submitting to that counsel, was likewise worthy of severe punishment, with the gate of hope left open before it, and the proclamation of the existence of a loyal and honest remnant, to get to enjoy the salvation of God.

That prophecy presents the natural fruit of the evil alliance, involving the leaning upon human arm and thought, and disregarding the divine factor. That fruit is a natural punishment, under which man, in his evil, would fall.

a. Loss of immunity: ***“The fortress also will cease from Ephraim.” (Is. 17: 3) “In that day his strong cities will be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left***

¹ Ironside: *The Prophet Isaiah*, 1985, p. 99; *The New Westminster Dict. of the Bible: Aroer*.

قاموس الكتاب المقدس: عروعر.

² *On Nativity, hymn 2.*

because of the children of Israel. And there will be desolation.” (Is. 17: 9)

If the Lord, God of our salvation, is “*the Rock of our stronghold*,” (Is. 17: 10) isolation from Him and rejection of His work is a loss of the real stronghold. Then, fortresses would not be able to protect our inner city, which would become like a valueless ruinous heap, that although with a deceiving outer appearance, yet, without any real power!

God is our true stronghold, in whom we find refuge, and where our depths would find comfort. Then all the forces of darkness would not be capable of sneaking into us.

b. Loss of inner glory: “***In that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob will wane.***” (Is. 17: 4) If “*The royal daughter is all glorious within...*” (Psalm 45: 13), the source of her glory is her Christ, dwelling in her, who establishes His kingdom within her. Christ Jesus glorifies her before people, and before the Father; as said by **St. Jerome**: [Look at us, to behold Your Son, who is dwelling in us¹.]

c. Loss of strength: “***And the fatness of his flesh grow lean.***” (Is. 17: 4) That is why the Lord Christ says, “*Without Me, you can do nothing.*” (John 15: 5)

- ❖ We cannot walk along the way of God, unless we are carried on the wings of Spirit².
- ❖ There is none stronger than him, who enjoys heavenly support, and none weaker than him who is without it³.
- ❖ We should fear nothing. As, in order to overcome the devil, we have to apprehend that our skills are worthless. All things are graces of God⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

d. Loss of fruit: The valley of Ephraim was known for its fertility and rich crops. Yet, because of enemies, there would be nothing left for Ephraim, except to pick up the grains fallen from the harvesters, and to gather what are left, “***like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives at the top of the uppermost bough.***” (Is. 17: 5, 6) That is, to become like the poor who have nothing to harvest (Deuteronomy 24: 20).

They fence their fields and plant them, but at the harvest time the enemy come to take everything, leaving only what falls on the ground, to turn the feasts of harvest into “***days of grief and desperate sorrow***” (Is. 17: 11) In other words, they would lose the fruit of their labor, their joy, and their peace.

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، ص 45.

² In Matt. In Gen. PG. 57:30; 53:228.

³ In Paralyt. PG. 51:51.

⁴ In Act. PG. 60:124.

And now, let us ask: **Why does God allow such humiliation for Ephraim?**

To lead him to return to his Creator, instead of sharing with the Syrians their evil counsel, their pagan worship, and their uncleanness, saying, ***“In that day man looks to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel. He will not look at (poles of) the altars, the work of his hands. He will not respect what his fingers have made, nor the wooden images (Asherah poles), nor the incense altars (hammanum).”*** (Is. 17: 7, 8)

‘Asherah poles,’ statues and images of the goddess of love and beauty (Ashteroth) parallel to Aphrodite¹, were put on wooden poles. That goddess was considered as wife and companion of the god Baal, that is why his altar was surrounded by groups of trees or poles that carried statues of the goddess, referring to her fertility².

Those poles and trees used to carry pornographic sexual symbols; worship was mixed with uncleanness as an integrated part (Exodus 34: 13; Deuteronomy 16: 21; Judges 6: 25; 2 Chronicles 34: 4.7; Micah 5: 14). God allowed for chastising His people, in order to purify their look at sex; and to lift up their hearts and minds toward God, who is above sex, and who grants us holiness of married life and sexual relationships³.

As to the altars of incense, the Hebrew word ‘*hammanum*,’ means ‘sun-goddess,’ interpreted by some as ‘*Baal Hamman*,’ the Syrian god of the sun. On these altars incense for the sun-god was offered. That expression for that form of pagan worship designates it from the holy incenses which is offered in the temple of the true God⁴.

3. THE ENEMIES’ ATTACKS

He is portraying the enemies as an irresistible sea. God allowed a large multitude of nations to descend upon Ephraim like many waters to inundate it. Yet God has designated, for that sea, a limit that it is not to be crossed. It is allowed to advance to a certain limit, and for a certain time, in order to preserve the little honest remnant of His children, against the fury and wrath of the sea.

“The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters. But God will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, and be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. Then behold, at eventide, trouble! And before the morning, he is no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us.” (Is. 17: 13, 14)

God allows the enemies to attack, like the irresistible many waters of the sea. Yet, when He rebukes them, they becomes like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, weak and

¹ C.F. Keil: *Comm, on the O.T.*, vol 7, p. 343.

² J.N. Oswalt: *The Book of Isaiah*, p. 352.

³ cf. Oswalt, p. 353.

⁴ *Ibid* 351, n. 1.

helpless, or like an unstoppable rolling wheel before a whirlwind.

Our enemy is extremely fierce; if we let ourselves be in his hand he would draw us in his whirlpool, to sink in the depth of his sea. But if we hide in the Lord, those enemies would turn to nothing before us; would withdraw as chaff before the whirlwind of His Holy Spirit; and would roll before the active Word of God.

He says, “*At eventide, trouble!*” (Is. 17: 14); namely, when the Sun of righteousness sets from our life, darkness would prevail in us, as though in the evening; to give the enemy a place in us, and a chance to terrorize us. But, before the morning, that is to say at dawn, when our Christ shines in us, the enemy becomes no more. That would be his portion, as he has robbed our life and plundered our glory, to end up destroyed before the Mighty One who dwells in us.

CHAPTER 18

CUSH BRINGS A PRESENT TO THE LORD

This chapter is considered as the most vague of all in the Holy Bible. A minority of scholars believes that the talk here concerns Assyria; but the majority believes that it concerns either Egypt or Ethiopia. Yet some reject referring it to Egypt, on the ground that the prophecy concerning Egypt will come in the next chapter that begins with the phrase: “*The burden against Egypt*” (Is. 19: 1).

Cush here means ‘Southern Egypt’ - nowadays, Nubia, Sudan, and Ethiopia; under the great king Tirhakah (2 Kings 19: 9), who reigned over Cush and Egypt. He sent messengers on small vessels of reed to Judah, requesting an alliance against Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

The prophet wanted to confirm, that if Cush requested an alliance against the growing might of Assyria Cush together with Egypt will come to Jerusalem to join the rest of the nations, to worship the Lord of hosts. In other words, God is in no need of human alliances against the forces of evil, as He is a mighty Stronghold for all nations that worship Him.

1. A delegation from Cush 1-6.

2. Cush brings a present to God 7.

1. A DELEGATION FROM CUSH

The prophet addresses Cush, saying, “*Woe to the land shadowed with buzzing wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.*” (Is. 18: 1).

What does he mean by the expression “*The land of buzzing wings*”?

a. Some believe that it is a reference to the empirical authority that stretched its wings over all the land of Cush and its neighbors. The Holy Bible used this expression several times: saying about the king of Assyria: “*The stretching out of his wings, will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel*” (Is. 8: 8); and likening the king of Assyria as “*a great eagle with large wings and long pinions*” (Ezekiel 17: 3).

b. Certain scholars believe that the expression “*buzzing wings,*” refers to the authority and greatness of Egypt. Others believe them to be referring to Great Britain, with its great glories across the seas. Yet others believe them to refer to the United States of America, that have the eagle as its symbol¹.

c. The buzzing wings referring to insects, symbolize the land of Cush famed for its flying

¹ *Ironside: The Prophet Isaiah, p. 103/4.*

insects, especially that the Hebrew word ‘*silsal*,’ was used in the book of Deuteronomy 28: 42 to designate insects (locusts)¹.

d. The word ‘*sel*’ means ‘shadow,’ so it is referring to countries close to the equator, where the value of shade is doubled of great importance because of the intense heat².

e. Some based their interpretation on what came in the Septuagint version and the Targum, that the buzzing of wings refer to vessels; as if the prophet is saying that the Ethiopian vessels stretch their sails as the wings of insects. Sailors used to call sails ‘wings³.’

Anyway, the King of Ethiopia, in a hurry, sent ambassadors on board his vessels of reed. The enemy was close by, and its danger was at that time, eminent on the whole world. The Ethiopians were well known for their capabilities of spying on locations and movements of the enemies, using their small swift vessels. That is why the king did not lose much time to invite Judah to join forces with him against the growing danger of Assyria.

The delegation of the king was for alliance, but it was not one for peace, it was rather an invitation for war against Assyria, and a rebellion against Sennacherib; something that all nations looked forward to, as it is said: ***“All inhabitants of the world and dwellers of the earth. When he lifts up a banner on the mountains, you see it; and when he blows a trumpet, you hear it.” (Is. 18: 3)***

I wish the messengers of the Bible bear such zeal like that of the king of Ethiopia and his messengers. They are invited to set forth to join forces, not against Assyria, but against the devil, when the banner of the cross is lifted up, and the trumpet of the word of God is blown. For the spiritual battle to be fought under the leadership of the incarnate, crucified, divine Word, who bears us in Him, and hides us in His pierced side, to grant us the spirit of conquest and victory. He entered the battle through His temptation on the mount, and had victory in our name and to our credit. Then He remained striving for our sake, until He consummated His strife on the cross.

❖ God taught us, through His example, how to be able to conquer, where He was tempted⁴.

Abbot Serapion

❖ Jesus, our Leader, allowed himself to get into temptation, to teach His children how to fight⁵.

St. Augustine

The prophet says, ***“Go swift messengers, to a nation tall and smoothed skin, to a people terrible, from their beginning onward; a nation powerful and treading down, whose land the***

¹ Oswalt, p. 359.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Cassian: Conf 5:5,6.*

⁵ *Serm, on N.T. Lessons 1; On the Holy Trinity 4:13.*

rivers divide.” (Is. 18: 2)

Some scholars believe that the description here applies to Ethiopians, to Assyrians, or even to Medes. Yet, this delegation was directed to the people of God, who was called “*an awesome people,*” because their God is an awesome God (Exodus 23: 27; 34: 10; Deuteronomy 28: 58; Joshua 2: 0; Psalms 139: 14). It was an awesome people from its start of its existence, got out of Egypt by a mighty hand and an exalted arm. As to his saying, “*Whose land is divided by rivers.” (Is. 18: 2)*, that may refer to its critical situation; the enemy about to attack it, as a torrent river. As to describing it as, “*a nation tall (extended) and smoothed skin (sharp) (Is. 18: 2)*; it came in the Septuagint version as “*a nation torn and crushed...*” the enemy dragging the people as sheep, and taking them into captivity.

If the prophet is asking the people to reject the delegation of the king of Cush seeking alliance, what is God’s position concerning the aggression of Assyria against His people?

“*For so the Lord said to me, ‘I will take My rest, and I will look down from My dwelling place. Like a clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.’” (Is. 18: 4)* It looks, as though, God is does not care about us. He might let the arrogant king of Assyria kill and destroy cities, till he reaches the gates of Jerusalem. Then God would proclaim His hidden role, and turn the king of Assyria back, demolishing his pride and that of his armies.

The Almighty God cares for everything large and small, but in His longsuffering, we assume that He has forgotten us, or does not care for us; then to say with the Psalmist, “*Do not forsake us to the end.*” As, even, if He seems as though He has forsaken us, He is actually planning for our salvation and edification.

St. John Chrysostom likens God to a mother taking her little child’s hand in hers, to train him to walk; and then all of a sudden, she draws away her hand from his. When he falls down, and lifts his eyes toward her in teary admonition, she gives him her hand back. By that, she gets him to walk. She may pretend to leave his hand, but she would never take him out of her thought or heart.

What we consider forsaking is actually care. God, in the midst of our afflictions, looks down on us, to turn our bitterness into heat, that gives maturation to beans, or into a cloud in the heat of harvest, that gives dampness and shade. It is apparently afflictions, but inside, it is edification and comfort!

He also sees in afflictions, a kind of ‘*cutting down the extra branches,*’ to let the tree produce more fruits (Is. 18: 5).

Finally, having allowed Sennacherib to conquer many cities in Judah, God destroyed him and his forces, just before entering Jerusalem, leaving their dead corpses “*for the mountain birds of prey, and for the beasts of the earth” (Is. 18: 6)*. In one single day, 185 thousands of Sennacherib’s men were killed.

2. CUSH BRINGS A PRESENT TO GOD

If Cush, Egypt, or other nations, think that they are capable of protecting the people of God against Assyria, they will all realize that they are in need of Him, who comes out of the tribe of Judah, to be protected against the devil and all his evil works. So that all the nations, struck with pride, would humbly come to bring a present to the Lord of hosts (Is. 18: 7), to the “*Mount of Zion,*’ that is to say to His Church.

The prophet Isaiah saw uncountable numbers of kings, rulers, and elite, coming to Jerusalem, to worship the true King, who never put on His head a worldly crown, but one of thorns. He saw believers as spiritual kings submitting to the King of kings, the Lord of glory, who comes out of the tribe of Judah.

CHAPTER 19

BLESSED IS EGYPT, MY PEOPLE

In the previous chapter, the prophet persuaded the king of Cush and Egypt, to bring a present to the Lord of hosts, to the Mount of Zion, instead of sending a delegation to request alliance with God's people against Assyria. In the present chapter, he presents a prophecy about Egypt, representing with its Pharaoh, the violence and fierceness of the world, and with the fertility of its land, the luxuries and desires of the world, and with its idols and temples, the leaning on human wisdom and capabilities. The prophet foresaw the Lord Himself coming to Egypt carried on the arms of St. Mary, the white, swift, and light cloud, coming in His infancy, to destroy, with His innocence, Egypt's idols and magicians; and "*to set an altar to the Lord in the midst of its land, and a pillar to the Lord at its border.*" That was a clear prophecy concerning what would happen to the Holy Family, and also about establishing the living Christian Church in Egypt, as a blessed people to the Lord.

1. **Escape of the Holy Family** 1.
2. **Chastising Egypt** 2-17.
3. **Setting an altar to the Lord** 18 –25.

1. ESCAPE OF THE HOLY FAMILY

We would never find a land, talked about in the Holy Bible, beside Canaan, like Egypt. The reason for this was that Israel as a nation and a people has settled down and lived in Egypt for about 400 years, to come out of it by an exalted arm. By their exodus, through the blood of lambs, they became a symbol for the whole world, set free from the servitude of the devil, through the blood of the unique Victim Christ. Egypt turned to represent, in general, the strength of the world, and the house of servitude, out from which God leads His people to salvation.

Isaiah began his prophecy about Egypt, by a joyful portrait concerning it, saying, "*Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt. The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.*" (Is. 19: 1)

St. Cyril the Great sees in that light swift cloud (the Septuagint version), the Virgin St. Mary, who has been sanctified by the Spirit of God, to become light and exalted, carrying the Lord of glory, Jesus, to escape with Him to Egypt, from the face of Herod (Matthew 2: 13 - 15). By His entry, the idols tottered, and with them the pagan worship; and the hearts of Egyptians melted in love, to receive Him to dwell in them, **St. Cyril** says, [The shining cloud that carried the Lord Jesus to Egypt is His mother, the Virgin St. Mary, who surpassed the clouds with her purity. As to the altar that was set in the midst of the land of Egypt, it is the Christian Church that

was established on the ruins of the pagan temples, after the collapse of their idols, before the face of the Lord Jesus¹.] That is why the Church sings on the feast of the entry of the Lord Christ into Egypt, saying, [Rejoice and be Joyful, O Egypt, with all your children; as to you, came the Lover of mankind, who exists before all ages.]

Egypt, with its Pharaoh and pagan worship, represented the ancient pagan world, in its violence and uncleanness. Yet it has been a refuge for many, particularly at times of famine. To it came our father Abraham (Genesis 12: 10). It received Joseph, persecuted by his brothers, to become the second man after Pharaoh, to provide out of its storehouses, life for all the neighboring countries. To it, our father Jacob came with his children, to start the nucleus of the ancient people of God, with its twelve tribes, and to produce the first of their leaders, Moses, the great among prophets, supported by the first High Priest Aaron. Among the prophets who came to Egypt, was the prophet Jeremiah, who tried to dissuade the people from escaping to Egypt, but to be forced to accompany them into it (Jeremiah 41: 1; 43: 7). His last prophecies were uttered in Tahpanhes, in Egypt (Jeremiah 43: 8; 44: 1). As to the heavenly coming of the Lord Christ to our land, He established in it a Church characterized by divine blessing, carrying in its worship, rites, and songs, tunes of heavenly life.

Egypt, filled with pagan worship, that set gods of calves, crocodiles, frogs etc., has received the Lord of glory, to establish out of the hearts of Egyptians a sanctuary for Himself. Egypt was transformed from being the greatest fortress of paganism, to become the greatest center of Christian thought, of spiritual worship, and of evangelical life, within a short time lapse. The star of the Church of Egypt twinkled, through the School of Alexandria, the teacher of Theology and Bible interpretation to the whole early Christian world; and the leader of the movement of defending the straight faith, on a universal level. From Egypt, the movement of Christian monasticism, in all its forms, set forth, to draw the heart of the Church toward the wilderness, to practice the angelic inner life, at the same time the gates of the empirical courts were opened before people of religion. As danger chased the Church, where spiritual work is conducted amid political and contemporary authority, the Church of Egypt carried the cross of its Groom along the ages, and presented uncountable numbers of martyrs and confessors, when entire cities were martyred, and thousands have raced to gain the crowns of martyrdom, with joyful hearts².

2. CHASTENING EGYPT

The escape of the Holy Family to Egypt, and setting an altar to the Lord there, do not mean putting a cover over its evils, but on the contrary, God revealed its spiritual wounds, in

¹ Fr. T. Malaty: *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church*, Ottawa 1988, ch 1.

² للمؤلف: الكنيسة القبطية الأرثوذكسية والروحانية، أتاوا، كندا، ص 5-6.

order to take away from it every weakness ‘kingdom of evil,’ and to set what is new ‘kingdom of God.’ The coming of the Lord to it means destroying its idols, and casting away its uncleanness, in order to sanctify its people.

The fruits of the ancient uncleanness were demonstrated as:

(1) Occurrence of civil wars: ***“I will see Egyptians against Egyptians. Everyone will fight against his brother, and everyone against his neighbor, city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. The spirit of Egypt will fail in its midst.”*** (Is. 19: 2, 3) This is a natural fruit of its isolation from God, the Grantor of inner peace, love, and unity. Wars occur on the personal level between friends, as well as between cities and kingdoms. [There has been a kingdom in upper Egypt, and another in lower Egypt.] Evil destroys the inner soul, and let it enter into a condition of despair.

Isolating ourselves from God leads us to lose our inner harmony, through which our inner life would be turned into a battlefield, where the body wrestles against the soul, and where the inner energies do not harmonize with each other, the heart turning into a kind of hell. The other way round, when God takes over the leadership, man submits wholly to him, to live in harmony, the body supports the soul in its worship, and the senses and emotions become sanctified, to work hand in hand with the pure mind, with a good and holy will in the Lord.

(2) Loss of true wisdom. The Egyptians were known as people of high intelligence¹. The Holy Bible testifies how Moses was *“learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.”* (Acts 7: 20) But isolating themselves from God, has led to loss of everything; their wisdom, knowledge, and civilization did not help them, so they resorted to seek the counsel of idols: ***“I will destroy their counsel. And they will consult the idols and the charmers, the mediums and the sorcerers.”*** (Is. 19: 3)

(3) Suffering cruel masters (Is. 19: 4), with more love for authority, than for serving the people and building the country. Hardening of people’s hearts, distances them from God, the Grantor of goodness and compassion, who would allow for fierce leaderships, to let them be treated the same way they treat others. This is exactly what happens in our daily life: in work, and in our personal and family life etc. Whoever treats his parents hard, his body would be as hard, in its war of lust against his soul. What we sow to others, we shall reap in our personal life.

(4) Suffering a condition of draught: ***“The waters will fail from the sea, and the rivers will be wasted and dried up. The rivers will turn foul, and the brooks of defense will be emptied and dried up. The reeds and rushes will wither. The papyrus reeds by the river, by the mouth of the river, and everything down by the river, will wither, will be driven away, and be***

¹ Bultema, p. 195.

no more. The fishermen also will mourn. All those will lament who cast hooks into the river, and they will languish who spread nets on the waters. Moreover those who work in fine flax, and those who weave fine fabric will be ashamed. And its foundations will be broken. All who make wages will be troubled of soul.” (Is. 19: 5 - 10)

It is as though evil carries its bitter fruit even in man’s daily life and in his necessary needs; the River Nile dries up [In many parts of Upper Egypt, it is called ‘the sea’]; people deprived of water to drink, or to irrigate their land; even fishermen will lose their source of income, to mourn with no avail. All that would affect the general economy of the country: the natural resources (water), food (fish and agricultural products), fabrics for clothing, and above all man would lose his inner peace!

(5) Loss of wise counselors: man would not only suffer material losses, but also would lose wise counselors to support him in difficult times. So it is said: ***“Surely the princes of Zoan are fools. Pharaoh’s wise counselors give foolish counsel. How do you say to Pharaoh, ‘I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? Where are they? Where are your wise men? Let them tell you now, and let them know what the Lord of hosts has purposed against Egypt.’” (Is. 19: 11, 12)***

In place of wisdom, for which Egypt was known, foolishness prevailed, even in Zoan, the capital of ancient Egypt. It was said: *“Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt.”* (1 Kings 4: 30) Yet that wisdom disappeared, once man isolated himself from his God the Source of wisdom. That is why the counselors of Pharaoh gave him a foolish counsel. A sign of losing their wisdom was their inability to apprehend the plan of the Lord of hosts against Egypt (Is. 19: 12). How, then, could the people of God, trust in the Pharaoh’s counsel, concerning the alliance against Assyria?

“The officials of Noph have become fools. The princes of Noph are deceived. They have also deluded Egypt, those who are the mainstay of its tribes.” (Is. 19: 13) That was the great problem for Egypt; it received foolishness as if it was wisdom. The rulers of Noph (Memphis), the capital of Upper Egypt, were deceived by the supposedly wise counselors. Those were parallel to the false prophets, of whom the prophet Jeremiah talked so often.

(6) Loss of consciousness and entering into a condition of drunkenness: ***“The Lord has mingled a perverse spirit in her midst. And they have caused Egypt to err in all her work, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit.” (Is. 19: 14)***

As sin, is like bad wine that causes man to lose his consciousness. Whenever man drinks from its chalice, he aimlessly staggers like a drunkard, unable to perform any serious task to edify himself or others. That is the most dangerous situation, reached by any man, to lose his human stature, to lead his life as if dead, to him life is tasteless.

(7) Shuddering with fear: ***“In that day the Egyptians will be like women, and will be afraid and fear because of the waving of the hand of the Lord of hosts, which He waves over it.”*** (Is. 19: 16) Pharaoh who arrogantly thinks of himself as the one who is to rescue Israel and Judah from the hand of Assyria, will, together with his men, will tremble like women with fear before the Lord of hosts and before Judah (Is. 19: 17).

It is as though the Lord is encouraging Judah to have no fear before the words of Pharaoh, and persuading it to refrain from making any alliance with him, the way Israel and Aram did. Pharaoh himself is not only shuddering with fear before Assyria, but before Judah as well.

3. SETTING AN ALTAR TO THE LORD

Having revealed the ailments of Egypt, and what the sin has done to it, from a loss of unity and true wisdom, to cruelty of rulers, severity of nature (draught), confusion of economy (agriculture and industry), lack of leading human resources, entering into a condition of unconsciousness, together with fear and terror, even before Judah, the little kingdom - God intervenes to heal its wounds and save it, presenting the following blessings:

a. A new language: ***“In that day, five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the Lord of hosts; one will be called the city of the sun.”*** (Is. 19: 18) What are these five cities other than the senses of the believer? As the nations come to faith in the Lord Christ, they surrender the five senses in His hands, to sanctify to speak the language of the spirit instead of that of the flesh; to be told as to the apostle Peter: *“Your speech shows it.”* (Matthew 26: 73; Mark 14: 70)

The heart of the believer is lifted up to the heavenly Canaan, not only during partaking of the sacrament of the Eucharist, and all the other liturgies of the living Church, but also during his private worship, and even in his daily life activities. That is the work of the Holy Spirit of God in our life, to carry it to heaven, to experience it in our depths, to change our language to that of Canaan, that is to say, that of heaven - the language of love and inner joy; to share with the heavenly hosts their liturgies and incessant joy; and not to be *“people of obscure speech and difficult language.”* (Ezekiel 3: 5)

b. ***“Swear by the Lord of hosts.”*** (Is. 19: 18) What does that mean? Swearing was a sign of trust and faith in Him, in whose name man swears. Instead of swearing by the names of the pagan idols, nations-Egypt included-would receive faith in the Lord of hosts; hold fast to His name, counting it as the Source of their strength.

c. ***“One will be called the city of the sun.”*** (Is. 19: 18) That refers to Heliopolis, which was the center of the worship of the sun; to get transformed from that material worship to the worship of the Sun of righteousness that shines on those sitting in the darkness.

In the Septuagint version it came as ***“the righteous city,”*** carrying in itself the

righteousness of Christ.

d. Setting an altar to the Lord: ***“In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border.” (Is. 19: 19)*** That refers to the altar of the Church of the New Testament; as the altar of the Old Testament was in Jerusalem, outside which it was not allowed to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. The Holy Family crossed to Upper Egypt, to disappear for about three years and six months at the location, where the monastery of the Virgin Mary, known as ‘El-Meharrak,’ in the middle of Egypt, is located. In that location, an altar to the Lord was set, on which the sacrifice of Eucharist is offered - an enjoyment of the sacrifice of the cross itself.

As to the pillar at its border, this is St. Mark, the apostle, who came to Alexandria, at the border of Egypt, to preach the gospel, and to set the altar of the Church of the New Testament for the Egyptians to enjoy salvation from the devil, their oppressor; and to have the Lord Himself: ***“A Savior and a Mighty One, to deliver them” (Is. 19: 20).***

e. Spiritual Gnosticism (knowledge): ***“Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering. They will make vows to the Lord and perform it.” (Is. 19: 21)***

Of the best writings on the close connection of Gnosticism with worship, as with the biblical behavior in the daily life, was by **St. Clement of Alexandria**; That thought came as a golden thread in all his writings¹. Of his words about Gnosticism:

[These are the signs that designate our Gnosticism: First of all, Contemplation, and then keeping the commandments, to be followed by teaching promising people. A man with those features is considered a perfect Gnostic; and if he lacks one of them, his Gnosticism does not hold².]

f. An inner healing: ***“And the Lord will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal it. They will return to the Lord, and He will be entreated by them and heal them.” (Is. 19: 22)***

God will allow it to get struck, to chasten it for its weakness, to let it discover itself and realize its need for a Savior; to return to Him, to find in Him the only Healer of the wounds of the soul, and restoring its peace. Our Christ came as a Physician and Medication at the same time:

❖ Blessed is the (Physician) who descended and amputated without pain; healed our wounds by a non-bitter medication, sent His Son as a (Medication) to heal sinners!

St. Ephram the Syrian³

¹ 209. للمؤلف: آباء مدرسة الإسكندرية الأولون.

² للمؤلف: الكنيسة القبطية الأرثوذكسية ، 1986، ص 14.

³ *On Nativity, hymn 2.*

The Lord came to Egypt, and struck its idols, to let the Egyptians discover in Him the mystery of their healing.

g. As the conflict between Assyria and Egypt was flaring at that time; with the other nations including Israel, victims of that conflict, the coming of the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ, brought peace to all, and let all - in Christ Jesus - feel that the earth belongs to the Lord and His Christ, and is not a center of conflict; All partake together of worship. In a magnificent portrayal of that peace, the prophet says, ***“In that day, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will come to Egypt, and the Egyptians to Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.’” (Is. 19: 23-25)***

What does he mean by ***“In that day,”*** that came about five times in the verses 18 to 25, other than the ***“fulfillment of time,”*** when the Lord Christ came to grant us these blessings; came, to be ***“the Way,”*** in which all nations gather together, to enjoy spiritual unity, and a flood of blessings.

What does the gathering together of Egypt, Assyria and Israel, to share the enjoyment of divine blessing and eternal inheritance mean? It is a portrait of the (catholic) Church that embraces the enemies together, in a spirit of love and unity. Israel, has been struggling between making an alliance with either Egypt or Assyria, the two major forces at that time. But the coming of the Lord Christ solved that problem. All became members in one Church, enjoying the divine work, to have Egypt called God’s people, Assyria His handiwork, and Israel His inheritance.

CHAPTER 20

EGYPT SUBMITS TO ASSYRIA

At the time, God proclaims His plan concerning Egypt, and all nations, represented in Egypt that in its midst He will establish His spiritual kingdom, and will grant it His blessing. He, once more, confirms to the children of Judah, the futility of leaning upon Egypt, to protect them against Assyria, as Egypt itself, together with Cush are to be eventually captivated by Assyria, so that they won't lean upon human arms.

1. Captivity of Egypt and Cush 1-4.

2. Collapse of Judah 5-6.

1. CAPTIVITY OF EGYPT AND CUSH

Certain scholars believed that Sargon, king of Assyria, who dispatched Tartan to Ashdod, was Shalmaneser or Sennacherib, while others denied the existence of a king with that name in Assyria. But, as said by Bultema¹, God made the stones utter, to shame non-believers. Today, it became well known that Sargon has been one of the strongest kings of Assyria; he has been the father of Sennacherib, who confiscated the throne from Shalmaneser the fifth, and reigned after him.

The word "Sargon" means "assigned by God," or "the righteous king;" that name was meant to cover up his action of confiscating the throne.

Tartan is not the name of a person, but most probably a military rank.

Sargon dispatched the leader of his army to Ashdod, to face Soua, king of Egypt (2 Kings 17: 4); Ashdod, being on the border of the Philistines, has been a key to enter into Egypt.

Recent studies revealed that Soua was not the name of a Pharaoh, but was an abbreviation of the name of a garrison leader in the Delta, called Sibe, or it was an abbreviation of the name of a town west of the Delta, called Sais, used by Tefnakhte as a dwelling place².

Assyria, having defeated Aram and Ephraim, saw that the time was ripe to strike Pharaoh. So the king dispatched the leader of his army to Ashdod to occupy it. He was the same leader sent by Sennacherib to put Jerusalem under siege.

Wishing to move the feelings of His people, to transform their hearts, and to rebuke their leaning upon Egypt and Cush, God instructed His prophet to walk naked and barefoot before the people, for the duration of three years, to be himself a prophecy of what will happen to Egypt and

¹ Bultema, p. 204.

² *Ibid.*

Cush, when these two countries are captivated by Assyria, and their elite are led as prisoners and captives, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to their shame. Isaiah himself became “*a sign and a wonder*” (Is. 20: 3), an object of mockery by everyone who sees him, for the sake of the salvation of his people, and to stop them from leaning upon the Pharaoh of Egypt.

Isaiah, in his sufferings and nakedness carried a shadow of the Passions of the Lord Christ, who suffered nakedness to clothe us with His righteousness; carried the wounds of His people in His body to heal us. Isaiah walked as a slave, with no sackcloth on his body or a sandals on his feet, as an image of his Master *who “took the form of a servant”* (Philippians 2: 7), in order to set us free of the yoke of servitude.

2. THE COLLAPSE OF JUDAH

As the Pharaoh of Egypt submitted to Assyria, Judah got terrified; their hopes devastated to see the humiliation of Egypt the subject of their pride: “*And the inhabitants of this territory will say in that day, ‘Surely such is our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria, and how shall we escape?’*” (Is. 20: 6)

That is the end of everyone who leans upon a human arm!

CHAPTER 21

FALL OF BABYLON TO PERSIA AND MEDE

God, because of His love for His people allowed the captivity for the Egyptians by Assyria; in order to let the children of Judah, who were leaning upon Pharaoh, tremble. He, likewise, because of His love of them, allowed the chastisement for Babylon, that captivated His people, by Persia (riders of donkeys), and Medes (riders of camels), to let Babylon fall, with no intervention for the rescue by its idols. That is the way God works amid the nations, to sort out the wheat (the believers) from the straw, watching for His children against the evil ones.

- 1. A prophecy against Babylon 1-10.**
- 2. A prophecy against Edom 11-12.**
- 3. A prophecy against Arabia 13-16**

1. A PROPHECY AGAINST BABYLON

The prophet Isaiah refers to Babylon by a strange symbolic name: “*An oracle concerning the wilderness by the sea.*” (Is. 21: 1) He called Babylon, the golden city and the pride of nations, a wilderness, because of its evil, that turned it into a condition of desolation. It is probably called “*the wilderness by the sea,*” because of its location on the bank of the Euphrates

River, or because it was greater than any other nation. As waters refer to many nations it turned into a dry wilderness amid the nations.

Jews believe that demons dwell in three regions of the world: desolate wilderness, waters, and air. That is why the Lord Christ fought and conquered Satan, through His temptation on the mount, in the wilderness; He fought and conquered him in the waters of the Jordan, as though in his den; and also fought him in air, where He was lifted up on the cross and conquered. Babylon was called "*the wilderness by the sea*," confirming that it became a place for the devil, dwelling in the wilderness and also in the sea. St. John saw it as a "*harlot, sitting on many waters*." (Revelation 17: 1)

The prophet Isaiah saw the army of Cyrus, advancing to realize God's plan concerning Babylon, "*as whirlwinds from the South pass through, so it comes from the desert, from a terrible land*" (Is. 21: 1)

Whirlwind coming from the south means that it is hot, in contradiction to that coming from the north, which is cold. It is as though the army of Cyrus was like fierce hot winds laden with sand that would bury the fields, destroy the crops, harm houses and roads, and cause diseases of the eyes. In other words it destroys the capabilities of man his dwelling place and insight. That is different from the mild warm south wind, that is necessary for ripening crops, of which the bride of the Song of Songs says, "*Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its pleasant fruits*." (Song. 4: 16)

The prophet, with his amazing tenderness, even for enemies, could not bear seeing the destruction and plunder that will happen to Babylon (Is. 21: 2). So he says, "*My lions are filled with pain; pangs have taken hold of me, like the pangs of a woman in labor. I was distressed when I heard it; I was dismayed when I saw it. My heart wavered, fearfulness frightened me, the night for which I longed, has turned into fear for me*." (Is. 21: 3, 4)

He might have seen that vision at night (Is. 21: 4), as his enjoyment of prayer has turned into terror. Or he is probably talking on behalf of the Babylonians, whose night of banquet and joy turned into horror, because of the invasion by Cyrus. He saw the royal table ready, and the watchers preoccupied with eating and drinking, when it was fitting for them to treat their swords with fat, to make them ready for fighting the Cyrus.

The prophet could not bear to see Babylon with its elite, playing around without care, leaving the gates unattended, wide open before the enemy. His heart melted with horror and pain. How then, wouldn't we moan, when we see our ministers get preoccupied, away from their spiritual strife, with formalities and banquets, leaving the Church of God and His flock, with no one to watch.

Here are some everlasting words by **St. John Chrysostom** concerning ministry:

[I am a compassionate father. Hear what the apostle Paul requests: “*My little children, for whom I labor in birth.*” (Galatians 4: 19) Like a woman screaming of pain in the hour of labor, so do I¹.]

[I wish you could see the fire burning in my heart, to realize that I suffer much more than the grief of a young widow for her premature loss. I don’t think her grief or the grief of a father for losing his son is more than mine because of this present congregation².]

Then came the divine call to the prophet: “***Go set a watchman; Let him declare what he sees.***” (Is. 21: 6)

A prophet used to be called a “*watchman,*” a “*lookout,*” or a “*seer;*” his task being to lookout from his high tower, and to watch the souls with the word of God; also to see through spiritual insight, to proclaim the will of God and His salvation plan.

So the prophet Habakkuk did, as he said: “*I will stand my watch, and set myself on the rampart; and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am reproved.*” (Habakkuk 2: 1) The prophet Ezekiel was likewise often called “*a watchman.*” (Ezekiel 3: 17; 33: 2, 6, 7)

Isaiah saw Persia (riders of donkeys) and Media (riders of camels) advancing to invade Babylon. “***He listened diligently with great care.***” (Is. 21: 7), for it was a serious matter concerned the life of his people. He did not just see and listen, but he roared like a lion (Is. 21: 8), to proclaim God’s plan concerning the fall of Babylon, and the salvation of His people.

“***Babylon is fallen, is fallen! And all the carved images of her gods He has broken to the ground! O my threshing and the grain of My floor! That which I have heard from the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, I have declared to you.***” (Is. 21: 9, 10)

The repetition of an expression twice, like “***Babylon has fallen, has fallen,***” is one of the features unique to this book (Is. 21: 9; 24: 4, 16; 28: 13; 29: 1; 40: 1, 9; 43: 11 etc.). That may be, because this book of salvation is directed to the Gentiles, as well as it is to the Jews. The call for salvation is a collective call to receive the Lord of all, and to overcome the evil. It is fitting here for anyone, of Jewish or Gentile origin, to make sure that Babylon, that captivated his heart with lusts and violence, is falling before God’s salvation, to be replaced by the heavenly Jerusalem; that all the idols of Babylon are falling, to let God proclaims His Kingdom in the hearts. According to **St. Augustine**, that repetition twice, besides being a sort of confirmation, carries a symbol of love that makes two things into one. Through love, the inner Babylon, and the kingdom of the devil, who does not stand love, will fall. And by it we shall enjoy the biblical life, according to the commandment of the Lord: “*By this, all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (John 13: 35)

¹ In Hebr. Hom 23:9.

² Ibid.

The prophet sees the world as a threshing floor, where crops are treaded over, then processed to separate wheat from straw. It is the 'wheat' of the Lord Himself that should be separated from the 'straw' of the world.

St. Augustine talks about the Babylonian captivity and the salvation from it saying,

[The apostle says, "*All these things... were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.*" (1 Corinthians 10: 11) We should be aware of our captivity and, accordingly, our salvation. We should recognize Babylon, to which we were captivated, and Jerusalem that moans for our return to it. These two cities are actual cities. "Babylon" means "confusion," while Jerusalem means "a vision of peace!"

These two cities were built in a certain time, to become symbols of two cities that stay to the end of ages... When some will sit on the right, and other on the left, Jerusalem will be on the right, and Babylon will be on the left...

Two kinds of love realize these two cities: Love for God realizes Jerusalem, while love of the world realizes Babylon. Every one of us should ask himself: What does he love? Then he would know which one of the two is his home. If he realizes that Babylon is his home, he should start to free himself of greed, and sow love. But if he finds it to be Jerusalem he should stand fast in bearing captivity, hoping for freedom.... Now let us hear my brethren of this city that we dwell in, let us hear of it, sing of it and long to it¹.]

So **St. Augustine** sees the children of God, who are bound to divine love, as citizens of the exalted Jerusalem, the city of eternal love; living here striving against Babylon, that keeps on trying to captivate the children of God, to deprive them of their heavenly home; having surrendered themselves by themselves to captivity, through receiving sin. The Savior has come to open the gate of hope, to grant them the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

With a look full of hope, **St. Augustine** comments on the saying of the prophet: "*When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like those who dream,*" (Psalm 126: 1) saying,

[Man, who has been a citizen of Jerusalem, was sold because of sin, to turn into a transient (belonging nowhere)... "Babylon" means "confusion"... Things of this contemporary human life are nothing but confusion, not belonging to God. Amid this confusion, in this Babylonian land, Zion was captivated. Yet the Lord brought us back from captivity, to become like men who dreamed, that is we become happy as we received comfort...

We are grieving for what we are now, but comforted by hope. The presence that grieves us will go by, to get replaced by eternal joy. Then, there will be no need for comfort, as we will never be in any affliction².]

¹ On Ps., 65.

² On Ps., 126.

2. A PROPHECY AGAINST EDMOM

“The burden against Dumah: He calls to me out of Seir, ‘Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?’ The watchman said, ‘the morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; Return, Come back.’” (Is. 21: 11, 12)

The prophet calls Adam by a mystical prophetic name, “*Dumah*,” an abbreviation of *Idumea (Edom)*. If the name Edom means “bloody” or “earthly,” Edom referring then to the wicked, lovers of bloodshed, those who are bound to love the earthly and bodily things. The name “*Dumah*” means also silence or “stillness of death.”

The prophet stood continually on the watchtower every night (Is. 21: 8), as a sort of inner darkness prevailed on the world, in anticipation of the coming of the Sun of Righteousness to dissipate the darkness of the night, for the light of the morning to prevail. Now, he hears a voice, probably from heaven, or from the remnants of prophets and men of God:

“Watchman, what of the night?...” Here comes the fulfillment of time, and the light of the morning shone; Let the nations hush up, and bring to death its old man, in order to enjoy the Light of Life; Let them “*ask*” now, to find its Light through faith in the Lord Christ. Let them return and “*come back again*” to God the Savior, to find him stretching His hands in practical love to embrace them.

He repeats “*Watchman, what of the night?*” twice, for this speech is addressed, not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles, for all to enjoy salvation, contemplating in hushness, on the work of God with them.

3. A PROPHECY AGAINST ARABIA

It came originally as ‘*Ereb*’ and not as ‘*Arabia*,’ meaning “night,” speaking of all those dwelling in the darkness.

Here he addresses the tribes of the Dedanites and of Kedar, dwelling southeast of Edom; who received those fleeing from the sword, in exchange for water to drink and bread to eat.

As these tribes were living in the darkness of idolatry, they could not provide true help to those fleeing to them, as “*a blind leading a blind, will both fall into a ditch.*” (Luke 7: 39)

SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

The prophet Isaiah prophesies about the siege of Jerusalem, and the captivity of its elite; as they preoccupied themselves with military enforcements and provisions of supplies, especially water, and did not put the factor of returning to God into their consideration. Instead of true repentance, they lived in excessive luxury; as though saying, ‘Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we shall die,’ even in the moments of siege itself.

As the prophet makes it clear, that God would chastise the wicked who lean upon human arm, and who preoccupy themselves with worldly things, he widely opens, at the same time, the gate of hope, to proclaim the appearance of the Savior, who dwells in the new and free Jerusalem, which, the forces of darkness cannot siege.

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|---|---------------|
| 1. Siege of Jerusalem | 1-7. |
| 2. Human plans for salvation | 8-11. |
| 3. Disregard of repentance | 12-14. |
| 4. Dismissal of Shebna | 15-19. |
| 5. Eliakim appointed in Shebna’s place | 20-25. |

1. SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

“The burden against the Valley of Vision: What ails you now, that you have all gone up to the housetops?” (Is. 22: 1)

What does he mean by “the Valley of Vision”?

a. Jewish scholars believe that this title befits Jerusalem, as it is the city where God granted His ministers proclamations and visions¹. Inspiration might have used this title, in order to awaken in them the insight that had become obscure. This Jerusalem, that God allowed to be sieged is His city, in which He established His temple, to proclaim Himself, His kingdom, and His heavenly glories, to become the source of blessing for humanity; Yet, the corruption of its people obscured its insight.

b. It was called, “*the Valley of Vision,*” despite the fact that Jerusalem was not established in a valley, but on mountains. Yet being surrounded by high mountains makes it look as a valley. Anyhow, God wanted to make out of His city a well-established high mountain, but the corruption of its people got it down to become a valley.

¹ H. Bultema, p. 216.

Some people may ask: **About which siege the prophet is talking here?**¹ Is it the siege by Sennacherib, by Esarhaddon in the days of Manasseh, by Nebuchadnezzar, or that by Titus?

Some believe it to be the siege by Sennacherib, although spiritually speaking, it applies to every siege to which Jerusalem has been subjected, and applies the more to the siege that occurs to our inner Jerusalem: the heart, the mind, and the soul.

“Going up to the housetops” (Is. 22: 1): People did not expect God, who loves His city, and proclaims His presence, particularly in the inner Sanctuary, where His glory appears on the Ark of the Testimony - to allow the pagans to siege His city. That is why they went up on the roofs to watch by themselves what was going on in the outside.

Probably, their going up on the roof refers to their care for the outside more than for the inside, the appearances more than the depths. Instead of going deep into their inner souls to discover the cause of their weakness, they were more interested in what is on the surface (the roof). That is why the prophet rebukes them, saying, **“You who are full of noise, a tumultuous city, a joyous (proud) city.” (Is. 22: 2)**

These are outer features, as Jerusalem became like all the other capitals of the surrounding countries, boastful and joyful for vain and noisy appearances, instead of returning secretly and quietly to God the true Source of pride, strength, and joy.

“Your slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle. All your rulers have fled together. They are captured by the archers. All who are found in you are bound together, who have fled from afar. Therefore I said, ‘Look away from me, I will weep bitterly. Do not labor to comfort me, because of the plundering of the daughter of my people.’”(Is. 22: 2-4)

Isaiah, seeing what has become of the city of his God, much beloved to him, refused to be comforted by anyone, because of his severe bitterness. He saw the army of Jerusalem out in the fields, led by rulers who were not slain by swords, but, out of fear, they ran away, to be chased, captivated, and humiliated by the enemy.

“Your slain men are not slain by the sword.” The people having hit themselves with the arrows of fiery lusts, and having isolated themselves from God the Source of their life, their souls fell slain, even before the outer invasion. The prophet saw in a practical way what was more dangerous than Sennacherib and his armies: the surrender to sins and uncleanness, and the denial faith. For the sin *“has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chamber of death.” (Proverbs 7: 26)*

There was nothing left for the prophet except to shed his tears before the Lord. This is what any wise spiritual leader would do, who sees the people of God deviate or the souls perish; to say with the prophet Jeremiah, *“Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people”!* (Jeremiah 9:

¹ . *Ibid*, 216-7.

1) The Lord of prophets, Himself, “*saw the city and wept over it.*” (Luke 19: 41)

- ❖ I do not deny that the first Jerusalem has been destroyed because the evil of its people; but I wonder: Shouldn't you weep over your spiritual Jerusalem?

If someone commits transgression after receiving the mysteries of Truth, he should be wept over, as he was once in Jerusalem, and did not return to it yet...

Let us weep over our Jerusalem, as because of our sins, the enemies (the evil spirits) are surrounding it; sieging it, and are not leaving one stone of it unturned¹.

Origen

- ❖ The Lord wept over Jerusalem, having wished it the beatitude, through receiving faith in Him, and welcoming peace with God. That was what Isaiah called on them to do, saying, “*Let us make peace with Him*” (Is, 27: 5 LXX)... Let us make peace with God through faith².

St. Cyril the Great

- ❖ Our Savior does not stop weeping till now, through His elect, when He sees someone, forsaking the good life, and walking the evil way³.

Pope Gregory (the Great)

The people of Jerusalem, particularly the civil and religious leaderships, led a life of luxury, spending their nights in parties, eating and drinking, while Isaiah stood warning and threatening.

And now, the people are standing on the roofs to watch the devastation by their own eyes, while Isaiah's heart, broken with sorrow and bitterness, enters his mystery place to weep, hoping that God may have compassion upon His people. He lived bold and frank in his warnings, and loving and gentle in his feelings.

Isaiah describes the tumult, trampling and terror that occurred in Jerusalem (Is. 22: 5), as despair prevailed in the whole city; nobody knowing what to do, or where to go. Some called on others to fortify the walls, others called for escaping toward the mountains, while still others preferred to surrender. Jerusalem was transformed from being a valley of divine vision, to a valley of confusion and soul destruction... Isaiah called that day, “*the day of the Lord of hosts;*” being the day he chastised His people.

2. HUMAN PLANS FOR SALVATION

How was the situation in Judah toward what happened to Jerusalem? They disregarded “*the mystery place of the Most High*” who protects and fortifies them, according to what the

¹ 220. الإنجيل بحسب لوقا، 1985، ص 589 - 590.

² *Comm, on Luke, hom 131.*

³ *In Evang, hom 39.*

Psalmist says, “*He who dwells in the mystery place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*” (Psalm 91: 1) “*Trust in the shelter in the shelter of His wings*” (Psalm 61: 4)

Thus grace forsook them and were exposed in weakness before the enemy, “***He removed the protection of Judah. He looked in that day to the armor of the house of the forest.***” (Is. 22: 8)

Some see in the “*protection*” here, a reference to the veils that honorable women of that time used to wear to hide their faces. The prophet saw Judah as a spiritual bride of the Lord, who rejected her Groom, lost her purity and virginity, and shamelessly stripped away her veil, to expose her face and her body to the lust of strangers. That image applied to Judah, as its walls were destroyed and Jerusalem became exposed as an unveiled face, for strangers to take advantage of.

Judah tried to find a solution for that problem. Yet instead of returning to God, they resorted to human plans to realize salvation, of which are the following:

a. The people rushed to the “*house of the forest,*” built by King Solomon (1 Kings 7: 2) where he placed golden weapons, robbed later on by the king of Egypt to be replaced by brass weapons by Rehoboam. That house was full of weapons that were incapable of supporting the people or protecting them from their enemies.

b. Preoccupying themselves with the “*water of the lower pool*” to transfer water from outside the walls to inside of the city, to deny the enemy outside the walls its use, and to keep the imprisoned people from getting thirsty, or the diminishing of water.

c. As the walls started to crack, they thought of demolishing their houses, to use their stones to fortify the damaged city walls. They did not think of God, the true Wall, that cannot be approached by the enemy; God, who sets His grace to protect our inner walls from breaking down, as it is said: “*By my God I can leap over a wall.*” (Psalm 18: 29) “*I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.*” (Is. 49: 16)

3. DISREGARD OF REPENTANCE

God, with His love for us, calls upon us to repent, to weep and mourn over our sins, to enjoy exalted inner peace and unceasing eternal joy. But, man, with his near sightness, tends to enjoy temporary lust and worldly luxuries, assuming that “*tomorrow he will die.*”

“***And in that day the Lord God of hosts called for weeping and for mourning, for baldness and for girding with sackcloth. But instead, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating meat and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!***” (Is. 22: 12, 13)

- ❖ Those wicked people tended to kill themselves by all kinds of lusts... Yes, even if they live, they live in shame; considering their bellies as their gods; and when they die they will suffer¹.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

4. DISMISSAL OF SHEBNA

Views varied as to the position of Shebna in the household of king Hezekiah. He seems here to be his treasurer. In 2 Kings 18: 37 he was called ‘the scribe,’ and some see in him a minister or a counselor of the king. However he was an official of high authority, and most probably of foreign origin. To preserve his name, he hewed for himself a great sepulcher in the same location where the kings of Judah were interred. Because he was a wicked man, Isaiah rebuked him calling him “*the shame of his master’s house*,” and prophesied about his dismissal from his post, and replacing him by Eliakim, which was realized around the year 701 B.C.

His evil was, firstly, in not believing in the prophet’s words to the people, concerning their captivity. His building of a great sepulcher for himself was a sign of disbelief in Isaiah’s prophesies². And secondly his evil was demonstrated by his vain pride, wishing to be interred with the kings. Lastly, he has not been loyal to the king, abusing his trust in him. For all that, a divine decree was issued for his dismissal from his post, and deprivation of getting interred in the sepulcher he prepared for himself; and instead of enjoying the magnificent chariots, to be thrown in a foreign country carelessly like a ball that a child plays with and throws freely.

Many believe that Shebna is a symbol of the antichrist, who will appear at the end of times, or to the man of sin, who, in his pride, does not only wish to be interred in the Sepulcher of the kings of Judah, the descendants of David, but wishes to “*sit as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*.” (2 Thessalonians 2: 4) As to Eliakim he refers to the Lord Christ, who destroys the antichrist, and casts away his power to save the elect.

It is to be noticed here, that the prophet did not say that king Hezekiah would dismiss Shebna out of his office, but says, “*Indeed the Lord will throw you away violently, O mighty man, and will surely seize you. He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball into a large country... So I will drive you out of your office, and from your position I will pull you down*.” (Is. 22: 17 - 19)

5. ELIAKIM APPOINTED IN SHEBNA’S PLACE

Talk came here (Is. 22: 20 - 25) to open the gate of hope before every soul that the enemy intends to destroy. Shebna has to disappear and come to an end, to be replaced in his position, by Eliakim. The antichrist, the false prophet, or the man of sin, will possess authority and power, but will surely fall, and the kingdom of Christ will be eternally proclaimed.

¹ *Fest. Ep. 7.*

² *Bulteman, p. 221-2.*

This prophecy came to proclaim very clearly, that Eliakim is a symbol of the Lord Christ:

a. ***“I will clothe him with your robe and strengthen him with your belt. I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the house of Judah” (Is. 22: 21)***

Shebna has been proud of having the robe and belt with authority, and of being the second in command after the king, by whose trust he acted with the spirit of authority and arrogance.

But, as Eliakim takes over his position, he will be clothed with his robe and belt, yet, carry the spirit of fatherly compassion toward the people of God. The antichrist is one of authority with violence and severity, while Christ is love, compassion, and exalted spiritual fatherhood towards the people of God. What designates the children of God from those of the devil is their love filled with compassion, against the authority filled with violence.

About the Lord Christ it was said: *“The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty... The Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength.”* (Psalm 93: 1)

Isaiah saw Him clothed *“with red garments, like those of one treading the winepress”* (Is. 63: 1); As he was clothed with His Church, that got stained with His precious blood, to be sanctified and to carry his splendor. He girded Himself to wash the feet of His disciples, and to serve with the spirit of love and humility.

b. ***“The key of the house of David, I will lay on His shoulder. So He shall open, and no one shall shut, and He shall shut, and no one shall open.” (Is. 22: 22)***

Who will have the key but *“the Holy One, who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”* (Revelation 3: 7)? He is the Lord Christ who encourages His Church, by saying that He is the only One to open for it the gates of heaven, and to close it on her, to prevent the devil and all his hosts from approaching her.

As to the key with which He opens and closes, it is the *“authority to bind and loose,”* that the Savior has granted to His bride through His disciples (16: 19), according to **St. Cyril the Great**, and to **St. Jerome**. Or it is the cross, with which our Lord Jesus opens for us His paradise and closes the gates of Hades, according to **St. John Chrysostom**. And also according to the understanding of the Holy Scripture, especially the prophecies, that were previously sealed and not interpreted, according to **St. Gregory the wonder-worker**¹.

Likewise, according to the **Origen**, [Every work written, needs the Logos, who closed on it, to get it opened, who opens and no one shuts, shuts and no one opens. And once He does open it, nobody can doubt the interpretation He presents².]

¹ راجع تفسيرنا: رؤيا يوحنا اللاهوتي، 1979، ص 42-43.

² In Joan, book 5:4.

We should not wonder how it is possible to “*lay the key of the house of David on His shoulder;*” if we comprehend that that key is the cross that the Son of David has carried on His shoulder to realize our salvation.

c. ***“I will fasten Him as a peg in a secure place. And He will become a glorious throne to His Father’s house. They will hang on Him all the glory of His Father’s house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers.” (Is. 22: 23, 24)***

In the poor provinces people used, because of lack of space, to hang up many of their possessions, either clothes, kitchen utensils etc. on nails or pegs on the walls. Now the prophet sees that nail or peg, driven in a firm place, for the believer to hang on it all his needs and possessions, to be the Messiah the Savior; and that is in the Church, “***the house of His Father.***” This is an allegoric image that refers to the leaning of the believer on the Lord Christ, dwelling in His Church, and who carries all our burdens. On Him, the honest kings hang the crowns of their kingdoms; and on it as well, the poor hangs his simple possessions. He is the support of both the great and the poor alike.

Every vessel, whatever its value is, hung on it, will be a vessel of dignity, so that the believer will say with the apostle Paul: “*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.*” (2 Corinthians 4: 7)

That is concerning the faith in the Lord Christ, the firm peg in the Church, the house of the Father. What about the meaning of the removal of that peg (Is. 22: 25)?

Some believe that that removal means the rejection of the Jews of the crucified Christ. So He would (remove) Himself from those who have the symbols of, and prophecies on Him. Others believe that it refers here to whom the Jews saw, at that time, as a firm and honest peg (Shebna or any other), to compare between faith in the Messiah, the Savior, and the leaning upon human ways for salvation.

CHAPTER 23

BRINGING TYRE TO RUINS AND ITS RENEWAL

Tyre represents great richness and wealth, through its universal commercial relationships, together with its corruption and fortification. The prophet portrays the utter desolation that would happen to it, to suffer the same chastisements, together with the sinful people of God, according to the words of the apostle Paul: “*Tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek*” (Romans 2: 9)

Yet this chastisement does not remain forever, but God offers salvation to all, and Tyre would enjoy renewal in Christ Jesus, Savior of the world.

1. Bringing Tyre to ruins 1-14.

2. Renewal of Tyre 15-18.

1. BRINGING TYRE TO RUINS

We have previously referred to Tyre, in our interpretation of the book of Ezekiel (Ez. 26)¹.

The word ‘*tsor*’ (Tyre) means “rock,” probably because it was built on a rocky island. But **St. Jerome** believes that the word ‘Tyre’ in Hebrew means “tribulation².” Thus he sees that its inhabitants represent those who have fallen under the tribulations and anguishes of the devil.

Keith and Urquhart believe that what came in this chapter concerning Tyre has been literally realized³.

Tyre fell under siege several times of which Shalmaneser sieged it, in vain, for five years and Nebuchadnezzar, likewise, for seven years. Alexander the Great and took it over, after seven years of siege, in the year 332 B.C. then destroyed it. It was also sieged by Antigonus, and several times during the Middle Ages by the Crusaders. Tyre is considered responsible for the eruption of the Second World War, during which about 40 million people were killed, that was triggered when Germany ventured to establish a railroad between Berlin and Baghdad, to develop commercial relationships with the Middle East⁴.

What came here, does not concern a particular siege, but refers to what occurs to every

¹ للمؤلف: حزقيال، 1981، ص 176-180.

² PL. 25:24.

³ H. Bultema, p. 226.

⁴ Ibid, 227.

human soul, that likens Tyre in its preoccupation with richness together with defilement.

The prophet describes the siege of Tyre, saying, ***“The burden against Tyre: Wail you ships of Tarshish! For Tyre is laid waste, so that there is no house, no harbor, from the land of Cyprus it is revealed to them” (Is. 23: 1)***

Here he demonstrates the effect of the devastation that happened to Tyre, on the crews of the commercial fleet coming back from Tarshish. It seems that they were not aware of what happened to the city, and were shocked when they realized that there was no more entrance into it as the walls were destroyed, together with all houses. The serious news spread, being so serious to reach the island of Cyprus as a symbol showing that the incident was heard in all the countries of Europe. Some scholars believe that the armies of Alexander the Great that came from the island of Cyprus staged that siege.

The prophet calls on the neighboring cities to wail over the destiny of Tyre, as it has been, through commerce, a source of prosperity to them. Now as it is laid waste, some of these cities have lost much of their wealth.

The merchants of Sidon¹, who used to wonder in its streets, were so shocked and saddened, that they did not utter a single word. As to the Egyptians, inhabitants of the Nile Valley, they were likewise saddened, as Tyre has been an important center for import of their crops, in exchange of products of Tyre. The prophet refers to the River Nile by the name Shihor, meaning “disturbance” (Is. 23: 3).

Such was how Sidon reacted to the humility of its fallen daughter Tyre that has been like a bride in the Mediterranean, or as a crowned queen, that caused several cities in Africa and Europe to flourish. Now, it is turned into what is like a spinster maiden moaning for her loneliness, with no husband nor children. It has lost many cities, that were to it, like her own children (Is. 23: 4).

Egypt was saddened, as it lost an important center for export of its crops; and probably also, because of fear of having a similar destiny, which actually happened in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, who confiscated the wealth of Pharaoh, after sieging Tyre (Ezekiel 29: 17-20).

The prophet, then calls upon the small remnant remaining in Tyre to cross over to Tarshish, an ancient city in Spain, and one of the flourishing colonies of Tyre. They did leave as wailing refugees. Some believe that the prophet said that as a way of mocking the arrogant inhabitants of Tyre from old. How they travel in terror and fear to live as strangers and refugees.

Now, the prophet challenges his listeners with a theological question: ***“Who has taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are the honorable of the earth?” (Is. 23: 8)***

¹ “Sidon” means ‘fishing,’ 22 miles north of Tyre, is considered as the mother city of Tyre, and came to wail over what happened to its daughter.

In other words, who issued such verdict against that rich queen that flooded the countries that had relationships with her, with prosperity, dignity and pride?

“The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to bring to dishonor the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth.” (Is. 23: 9)

That was what the prophet Amos meant, by saying, *“If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?”* (Amos 3: 6)

Abbot Theodore says, [When divine judgment addresses humans, it would be according to their language and human feelings. A physician cuts or burns sore body parts, for the sake of the well-being of his patient, while some who can't bear pain consider that as acts of evil¹.]

The Lord has ordered it, yet the desolation has been caused by pride and vainglory. Sin corrupts man as it does to countries. But the verdict of the Almighty is a proclamation of what man brings upon himself by himself.

The prophet likens Tyre who fled after its devastation to a woman who lost everything, sailing along the River Nile, without a girdle around her robe; or to the water of the Nile at its exit, where it pours into the sea with nothing to restrain it. Such was the situation of the inhabitants of Tyre as they helplessly escaped from their city, overflowing through their land like the river into the sea (Is. 23: 10), calling Tyre ***“the oppressed daughter of Sidon.” (Is. 23: 12)***

“The Lord stretched out His hand over the sea... has given (the kingdoms) a commandment against Canaan, to destroy its strongholds,” (Is. 23: 11) to destroy its pride, to boast no more (Is. 23: 12); and instead of being a queen, to turn into an oppressed virgin, escaping to Cyprus, where it will have no rest. What does that mean?

a. The Lord stretched His hand, calling for repentance. Yet when Tyre did not respond, His hand became stretched for judgment. Such was the case, when the Lord of glory stretched His hands on the cross with love. Whoever believes would find in the cross the power of God for salvation, and whoever denies would come under judgment.

b. It was up to Tyre to escape to Cyprus. But there, it found no rest. Peace for man does not depend on the location where he is, but on the depths of his inner soul. His rest is not in changing his location, his work, or social circumstances, but in his return to God, his Savior, who calls: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11: 28)

And as **St. John Saba** says, [Blessed is he who calls You in himself all the time; from Him, life would flow to him to enjoy.]

As God knew that Tyre would not respond to His call He asked it to take a lesson from what happened to the Chaldeans on the hands of the king of Assyria, who turned their palaces

¹ *Cassian: Conf. 6:6.*

into heaps of dust.

2. THE RENEWAL OF TYRE

God in His love for mankind does not forsake man in his corruption, but offers him every chance for salvation. That is why, after the prophet portrayed the extent of devastation that would happen to Tyre, he started to speak about its renewal through God, the Savior. It would be oppressed by Babylon for 70 years, equal to the 70 years prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah concerning the Babylonian captivity of Israel (Jeremiah 29: 10). It is as though the nations would share that humiliation with Israel, *“For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”* (Romans 11: 32)

Jerusalem was accused of being a harlot (Is. 1: 21); and here Tyre is accused of being the same (Is. 23: 16).

The duration between the first year of the reign of king Nebuchadnezzar and that of king Cyrus was exactly 70 years, during which the nations were oppressed by Babylon.

The prophet describes Tyre as a harlot singing in public places to attract men. Such was what Tyre did with its commerce that was related to corruption. Then, as it fell under the Babylonian suppression for 70 years, it stopped practicing its activities, and exporting its corruption to neighboring countries, and became forgotten. The world forgot it, but God would not. He turned its humility into glory. After its commerce has been related to corruption it turns to become related to a holy life in the Lord. Its traders turn into witnesses to the gospel of salvation, as it enters together with the Gentiles into faith, to practice and preach evangelical life. After being in a condition of hunger and nakedness, not because of Babylonian captivity, but through servitude of sin, it, in the presence of the Lord, turned to feed on the bread of life, not to hunger any more, and to enjoy the garment of Baptism, not to be naked any more, according to the words of the apostle. *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.”* (Galatians 3: 27)

This is what the prophet meant by saying, *“Her gain and her pay will be set apart for the Lord. It will not be treasured nor laid up, for her gain will be before those who dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently and for fine clothing.”* (Is. 23: 18)

CHAPTER 24

DEFILEMENT OF THE EARTH

In the previous chapters the prophet demonstrated the activity of sin in the life of nations and peoples, giving prophecies concerning about seven nations, to confirm the corruption of all peoples, even his own people: Judah and Ephraim. Now, in chapters 24 to 27 he presents general prophecies concerning the earth as a whole, to reveal the generality of corruption. Yet, his talk shines with words giving hope, and opens the way to salvation.

The prophecies start with the proclamation that the same earth, that God created with His goodness, for the sake of happiness of mankind, became corrupted, and in need to be laid waste then renewed by God. That was what occurred to the flesh (as the earth refers to the earthly flesh). Sin has destroyed its capabilities and possibilities, and the very nature of things that God created is good, in order to work for the edification of the individuals and the people. We became in need of the renewal of our nature, namely the new birth, of the flesh together with the soul, with all the inner energies and capabilities.

- 1. General devastation** **1-13.**
- 2. Believers rejoice in the Lord** **14-16.**
- 3. Praise with terror** **17-23.**

1. GENERAL DEVASTATION

The prophet likens the earth as a whole, to a pot, in which all its contents got corrupted. That is why its owner would empty it completely, by turning it upside down, saying, *“And it shall be: As with the people, so with the priest, as with the servant, so with his master, as with the maid so with her mistress, as with the buyer so with the seller, as with the lender so with the borrower, as with the creditor so with the debtor.”* (Is. 24: 1, 2)

All its inhabitants are alike in rebellion. All are worthy of death. All are in need of a Savior who is capable of renewing their nature - the priest like the people, the great with the despised, the rich with the poor. It is as though necessary to empty the earth, to get it back to its original condition before its creation - empty and waste - for God Himself to recreate once again.

This is the theological principle of salvation: The creation has been utterly corrupted, and needed its Creator to renew it. And as **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says, [This likens a portrait of somebody drawn on a paint, later distorted by some foreign colors. It became necessary, for the artist who created it to renew the whole work over the same paint¹.]

¹ *Against Arians 1:14.*

What has sin or rebellion done to humanity? Humanity came near the fire of the divine wrath; thus got burnt. The cause of that burning is the rebellious will of man that draws him to perdition.

The prophet Isaiah presents a similitude to reveal the miserable condition that humanity reached: People used, at times of harvesting the vine, to hold joyful celebrations, to drink wine, sing songs, and give donations to the poor. Now, when time came, the vines are languishing, as they carry no fruits. The gaiety of the tambourine and the joy of the harp come to an end, and the noise of the jubilant ceases. All joys turns to gloom, all gaiety is banished from the earth. In desolation the city is left (Is. 24: 7-12).

So he likens the world to a burnt city turned into ashes, and sad dry fields that carry no fruits. He likens it to an olive tree that has shaken away its leaves, to turn bare of both leaves and fruits, and like ***“the gleaning of grapes when the vintage is done.”*** (Is. 24: 13)

It is fitting for the priest to realize his need for salvation, like anyone of his flock (Is. 24: 2).

And as **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, [Actually, there is no difference in this concern, between clergy and people¹.]

2. BELIEVERS REJOICE IN THE LORD

In the midst of that devastation, that deprived humanity of its inner peace and joy, there is a holy remnant that proclaims their joy in the Lord, through songs and praise.

“They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing. For the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Therefore, glorify the Lord in the dawning light, the name of the Lord God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea. From the end of the earth we have heard songs. Glory to the Righteous.” (Is. 24: 14-16)

He is speaking here, of the small remnant in the world that received faith, and returned to God. These dwell in ***the East***, that is, they enjoy the ***“Rising Sun of Righteousness”*** (Malachi 4: 3). And in order not to consider ***“the East”*** here as a mere location, he says, ***“Exalt the name of the Lord in the islands of the sea,”*** to confirm that the inhabitants of the west (the islands of the Mediterranean Sea to the west of Jerusalem) are also enjoying salvation together with those of the East.

The object of praise is: ***“Glory to (Christ) the Righteous One.”***

3. PRAISE WITH TERROR

The salvation that God offers to humanity makes believers’ hearts flare with joy and gaiety. Yet at the same time, it fills the denying unbelievers, together with the demons, with terror.

¹ *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus.*

The devil realized that he was robbed, as the cross has drawn a multitude of souls, previously captivated by the enemy, and as the resurrection has destroyed all forces of darkness, and opened the gates of paradise.

The prophet sees the devil as a wild beast, entangled in a net, and fallen into a deep pit, crying out, and wailing his condition in despair and trembling (Is. 24: 16-18), terrified to see himself falling down to the abyss, while the heaven and earth stand testifying to the cross:

”The foundations of the earth are shaken. The earth is violently broken, The earth is split open. The earth is shaken exceedingly.” (Is. 24: 18, 19)

“In that day the moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed, for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.” (Is. 24: 23)

The nature is testifying to the great weight of sin, that the Lord Christ has carried upon Himself in our place, as though it is an extremely heavy meteorite fallen to the earth, to split it open and to shake its foundation. The moon was abashed, the sun was ashamed of what the sin has done, and nature stood in shame and disgrace before what man has committed against his Savior and Redeemer.

Through the cross we entered into the spiritual reign (Revelation 20), where the Lord of hosts will reign on the Mount of Zion in Jerusalem (Is. 24: 23); reigning through the cross over the hearts of believers.

“They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison.” (Is. 24: 22) He *“made a public spectacle of them”* (Colossians 2: 15), giving us *“authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy.”*

The cross destroyed the enemy, proclaiming the divine glory ***“before the elders” (Is. 24: 23)***, as the apostles beheld the power of salvation, and realized it in their lives, as well as in their preaching.

CHAPTER 25

PRAISE TO THE LORD FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM

By the end of the last chapter, the part concerning Isaiah's warnings of the devastation to occur to the nations, because of their departure away from God, and their rebellion against Him, comes to an end. Chapters 25 to 27, on the other hand, present praises of salvation, proclaim God's intentions through His chastisements, and reveal the extent of His yearning for His beloved vine, and His invitation of His people to enjoy the great banquet, and the destruction of the devil's power.

Chapter 25 represents praise for the work of God with His people, bringing them back from captivity, and destroying their enemies (including Moab), as a symbol of His redeeming work in the New Testament, when He establishes His kingdom, granting His people the freedom and conquest over the forces of darkness.

This chapter and the next one lead us into the kingdom of the New Testament, as the Lord comes to establish His heavenly kingdom in the life of mankind. That was what St. John the Baptist proclaimed, at the beginning of his ministry, saying, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (Matthew 3: 1) The King Himself proclaimed: "*The kingdom of God is within you.*"

They denied the Messiah, the King, yet the King keeps on calling on all humanity to come to His kingdom, saying, in an open invitation across all ages: "*Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11: 28)

- 1. A praise of thanksgiving to the Lord 1-5.**
- 2. Banquet of the New Testament 6-9.**
- 3. Devastation of Moab 10-12.**

1. A PRAISE OF THANKSGIVING TO THE LORD

As Isaiah's eyes were opened to the kingdom of the Lord Christ, his heart got flooded with joy, and his tongue set forth praising the Lord for His work of salvation. After prophesying the bitter chastisements he turned into a psalmist praising the Lord. The mysteries of his praise and thanksgiving were:

a. Realization of the words of God and His honest true promises: "***O Lord, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name. For You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.***" (Is. 25: 1)

The prophet realized that the mystery of salvation lies in the honest promises of God, and

marvelous works of His hands. That is why **St. Irenaeus** comments on this praise saying, [We see here that our salvation is not through our own efforts, but through the grace of God¹.]

We praise God and give Him thanks, for His marvelous divine counsels, from the beginning, He is caring for our salvation; even before we ever existed, since we were in His thought, the subject of His love.

b. Devastation of evil (Babylon): ***“For You have made a city a ruin, a fortified city a ruin, a place of foreigners to be a city no more. It will never be rebuilt”***(Is. 25: 2)

Our salvation by the divine arm will be realized through the devastation of evil, namely the arrogant city of Babylon, the one filled with confusion, that embraces the antichrist. It is as though, the mystery of our praise is the setting of the kingdom of Christ, going hand-in-hand with the collapse of the kingdom of the devil, the opponent of truth, the devastation of his city, and destruction of his palace.

The ‘*city*’ here, probably refers to the control of the devil, of the congregation; his control of smaller units, like the family; and the place refers to his control of the hearts of individual. The enemy works on all levels, in order to reign through the congregation, the family, or the individual... Our Christ, likewise, opposes him on all levels, to devastate all traces of his kingdom.

As to calling the soul, controlled by the enemy, ***“a place of foreigners,”*** it is because the devil with his angels are occupying the soul, as foreigners, taking hold of what is not theirs. It is the good creation of God, into which they have infiltrated.

Probably also, devastating the city, the town, or the place of foreigners, all refer to the destruction of our old man with all his works, for the sake of the continuous renewal of the inward man, after the image of his Creator (2 Corinthians 4: 16).

c. Preaching: What rejoices the heart and fills it with praise, is that the setting of the inward kingdom of Christ, together with the devastation of the kingdom of the devil in us, is going hand-in-hand with testifying or preaching of the work of God and the gospel of His salvation. Thus drawing a multitude of souls, to establish a strong Church, not on account of the number of its members, but of the Mighty Christ dwelling in it. ***“The strong people will glorify You. The city of terrible nations will fear You.”*** (Is. 25: 3)

Our souls rejoice in the strong people of God, that carries in itself the power of His resurrection that has overcome death; to live strong and ruthless, practicing divine fear; as is said of them, ***“Breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army;”*** (Ezekiel 37: 10) ***“Awesome as an army with banners.”*** (Song 6: 10).

When the city of Babylon in us is devastated, and the strong town and stronghold of the

¹ Adv. Haer. 3:20:3.

devil are destroyed, the Lord will reign to set, out of us, a strong people, awesome to the enemy. What is that awesome people, but the sanctification of the soul, the body, the mind, the words, the emotions, even the shadow of man? Haven't the sicknesses got away before the shadow of the apostle Peter (Acts 5: 15); and illnesses were cured and evil spirits were cast away through merely looking at the handkerchiefs and aprons of Paul (Acts 19: 11)?

d. Granting the oppressed their rights: ***“For You have been a strength to the poor; a strength to the needy in his distress. A shade from heat; for the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. You will reduce the noise of aliens...The song of the terrible ones will be diminished.” (Is. 25: 4, 5)***

Humanity is moaning because of the law of oppression that prevailed, since sin entered to it. That is why God presents Himself as a Source of practical comfort, as a support to the wounded soul, a stronghold to the poor at times of affliction, a refuge against floods and storms, a shade from heat; While, “the blast (the breath) of the terrible (the ruthless) is like a storm against a wall.” God, with His exalted love, and His fatherly care, offers Himself to His believers according to their needs; becoming everything for them, for the sake of their peace, their edification, and their satisfaction. He is for them the strength, the stronghold, the refuge, the shading cloud, and the bread coming down from heaven etc.

2. BANQUET OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Word of God, the Savior, comes to every soul, to satisfy its needs, to grant it peace, and power against the evil enemy; and to enjoy the new life in Christ, as a permanent joyous banquet. That banquet, is actually, the truly fulfilling evangelic life, offered to all peoples. Here He describes it as:

a. A public banquet: ***“The Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces” (Is. 25: 6)*** The gate is now widely open before all peoples to enjoy the word of God, His covenants, laws, and works of salvation, particularly the fellowship of the Eucharist (the body and blood of the Lord). The gifts of God are no more confined to a certain people or to a special race.

The Lord Christ proclaims the generality of His invitation by saying, ***“Go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.” (Matthew 22: 9)***

b. A feast of choice pieces: (Is. 25: 6). What is this rich feast or rich banquet but the sacrament of the Eucharist, where the believers from all peoples share with the heavenly hosts in the praise; to have the gates of heaven opened before them; or let us say, the Church turns into heaven, where the believers enjoy the body and blood of the Lord, as salvation and satisfaction.

❖ ***“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.” (Psalm 23: 1)*** Listen to what David tells

you about the importance of the sacraments you have gained! How he started his psalm by proclaiming that he is not any more “*in want*”! Why? Because whoever partakes of the body of Christ will never get hungry any more!¹

St. Ambrose

- ❖ Those who are deprived of earthly blessings, because of their group age are granted the heavenly ones in richness and satisfaction, to sing with David: “*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.*” (Psalm 23: 1)²

St. Didymus the Blind

- ❖ That banquet, is the support of our souls, the basis of our hope, our salvation, our light, and our life.
- ❖ When you see the table set before you, you should say to yourself:
‘Because of His body, I shall not be any more dust and ashes; I shall not be a prisoner but free!

Because of this (body), I hope for heaven, and receive heavenly goodness, eternal life, angelic share and having a conversation with Christ.

That body which was nailed and flogged, not be anymore overcome by death!’

It is the body, that was stabbed and covered with blood, and from which came out the two springs for the salvation of the world: a spring of blood, and a spring of water!³

St. John Chrysostom

c. A spiritually joyful banquet: “*A feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees.*”
(Is. 25: 6)

The wine refers to spiritual joy; being fine or pure, means that it does not cause man to get drunk or to lose his consciousness, but gives him spiritual joy.

- ❖ The wine of the Lord is not like that which Noah drank in the book of Genesis; but being drunk by the glass of the Lord and His Blood is not as being the glass of wine of the world... For the glass of the Lord makes those who drink it more prudent, and grants their thoughts spiritual wisdom. It transfers man from tasting the world to apprehending God... It sets the soul free, and grants it comfort, offering it the joy of divine goodness, instead of the depression of heart, darkened because of the heavy burdens of sin⁴.

Martyr Cyprian

¹ *De Sacram. 5:12,13.*

² *De Trinit. PG. 39:708C.*

³ *In 1Cor. Hom 24.*

⁴ *Ep. 63:11.*

d. A heavenly banquet: Through which the cover and veil of the letter are taken away, to get those who partake of it into heaven itself, to discover its mysteries that were before veiled before humans. **“And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.” (Is. 25: 7)**

- ❖ The people who got purified and filled with amazing gifts starts to march toward the altar singing: *“Let us go to the house of the Lord. May God rejoice our youth...”* They are hastening toward the heavenly banquet¹.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ Every time we minister the Liturgy of this Sacrifice we should count ourselves like those in heaven².

Abbot Theodore

e. A life-giving banquet: **“He will swallow up death forever.” (Is. 25: 8).**

- ❖ Through this sacrifice, we, the mortals by nature, expect no death; we, the corrupt, no corruption; and in place of the earth with all its evils, we gain blessings and joys of heaven³.

Abbot Theodore

- ❖ In order not to boast assuming that life is our own doing, and get arrogant toward God, we should know through experience that if we are granted eternal life, we get it through that exalted sacrament, the “Eucharist⁴.”

St. Irenaeus

f. A glorified banquet: **“The Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken” (Is. 25: 8)**

He Grants His believers comfort in Him through the holy life, or through enjoying the righteousness of Christ. If tears have infiltrated to all humanity through its rebellion, our union with God, in His Son, through the Holy Spirit, will grant us steadfastness in Christ, who is obedient to the Father; thus taking away the heavy burden of our rebellion, and wiping away our inner tears; granting the soul inner glories, to be experienced in this life, as a pledge of the heavenly eternal glory.

Our life is a strife and struggle against the forces of darkness, a continuous battle, on the field of the inner heart, through which we are granted, by our Christ, conquest and victory; bandaging every wound, and wiping away every tear.

¹ *Myst. 43.*

² *Cat. Hom 15:20.*

³ *Ibid 13:12; 16:30.*

⁴ *Fr. Malaty: Christ in the Eucharist, 1985, book 1, ch. 6.*

- ❖ The sacramental banquet is the body of the Lord that supports us against our lusts, and against the evil one. It is true that the devil tremble before those who respectfully partake of these sacraments¹.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

3. DEVASTATION OF MOAB

As the believers rejoice for overcoming sorrow, bitterness, tears, and even death, through the free banquet of salvation, they say, *“This is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us.”*(Is. 25: 9)

Our joy is in our salvation from our enemies; namely from the devil, all his hosts, and his evil deeds; for the glory of the children of God, is accompanied by shame to the powers of darkness, symbolized here by Moab:

“For on the mountain the hand of the Lord will rest, and Moab shall be trampled down under Him, as straw is trampled down for the refuse heap. And He will spread out His hands in the midst, as he who swims spreads out his hands to swim. And He will bring down their pride together with the trickery of their hands. The fortress of the high fort of your walls, He will bring down, lay low, and brings to the ground, down to the dust.” (Is. 25: 10, 11)

If the powers of darkness have showed haughtiness over the children of God, and thought that they are capable of humiliating them, God through the cross, destroyed their strongholds, and brought them down to the abyss; giving us the authority to trample over serpents and scorpions and all powers of darkness; as straw is trampled down to use in building bricks. As though those powers, that were the cause of our perdition are transformed, through the work of salvation of God, into despised and humble items underneath our feet, to be used for the edification of our souls, as without the devil we would have never been crowned.

The mystery behind the devastation of the enemy is his pride, who thought of himself as protected within fortified walls, but God brought these walls to the ground, to expose the weakness of the enemy, and to reveal the truth of his helplessness before our Lord.

¹ PG. 33:841C.

CHAPTER 26

PRAISE OF RESURRECTION

The previous praise is offered to God by those redeemed, as thanksgiving for the blessings of salvation granted by God to His people. This praise is “a Psalm of resurrection” (Is. 26: 19), through which the people proclaim their trust in God.

Isaiah is looking forward toward the return of the people from captivity, carrying the spirit of conquest and victory, while Babylon and all its unique walls fall to the ground (Is. 26: 12), as a living portrait of the resurrection from the dead. That is why he utters praise, confirming his trust in God as the Grantor of life and resurrection.

Some scholars believe that what came here concerning the resurrection from the dead (Is. 26: 19) is the first text dealing openly with this issue in the Old Testament¹.

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|--|---------------|
| 1. A psalm motivating trust in God | 1-4. |
| 2. Fall of the enemy | 5-6. |
| 3. God supports His righteous | 7-16. |
| 4. His people pass through distress | 17-19. |
| 5. God, the Savior of His people | 20-21. |

1. A PSALM MOTIVATING THE TRUST IN GOD

“In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah.” (Is. 26: 1) By this introduction the psalm begins. It is the song of the New Testament. As it was impossible for the men of the Old Testament to sing it, he says *“In that day.”* The blessings that the old people enjoyed at the return from captivity do not provide permanent joy, unless it symbolizes the joyful salvation realized by our return from the captivity of sin, through the work of the cross.

This psalm is praise for Jerusalem, the city of God, because of the power and strength it enjoyed, together with open gates, righteousness, honesty and peace of its inhabitants

“We have a strong city.” (Is. 26: 1) He means Jerusalem as a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem; and also of the Church of the New Testament, being the city of God where He, Himself, dwells with His people.

“God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.” (Is. 26: 1) The works of salvation of God are the walls of the city, and its military instruments. The enemy may be able to fight it, and may try to seduce it, but cannot overcome it as long as it is honest to God.

The Fathers of the Church, particularly **St. Augustine**, often spoke of our inner life, as a

¹ Cf. J. Collins: *Collegeville Bible comm.*, 13, *Isaia* p. 59.

Church of Christ, as a heavenly city of the Lord, which is, in its essence, a dwelling place of God - the Love - with His people. Love is its foundation, its treasure, its language, and its law. The city of the Lord is the city of love!

- ❖ As you acquire the perfection of knowledge, and become in love, the throne of God, you turn into a heaven!

The heaven we see with our eyes when we look upward is not of such great value to God. The righteous souls are His heaven... Every soul is Zion... It is obvious that Zion is the city of God; and what is His city, but the holy Church?

As men love each others, and love God who is dwelling in them they become His city... It was written, “*God is love.*” (1 John 4: 8) Whoever is filled with love, is filled with God¹.

- ❖ We are taught that there is a city of God; its founder inspired us to love; that made us yearn to be citizens in it².

St. Augustine

By love, God set up every soul to be His fortified city and His holy heaven, He set it up as His heavenly bride, united with Him, who has the same possibilities of her Savior Groom, raised to heaven, to have the ancient gates opened before Him, that the King of glory may come in (Psalm 24: 7 - 10). She is also His bride, who carries His righteousness and honesty. Before her, the gates of heaven will open, to let her sit on the right hand of her Groom King, and in His bosom. No power can deny her crossing the heavenlies to reach to His throne. She would be like “Esther” the queen, who crossed all the gates of the palace, to reach to where the king was sitting, who held out to her his golden royal scepter, to give her permission to approach him, and to grant her wish.

Isaiah enjoyed these prophetic inspirations, when he saw in spirit those returning from captivity, entering through the open gates of Jerusalem; entering as though in a procession of conquest, in a joyful feast in the Lord. So he said: “*Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.*” (Is. 26: 2)

- ❖ “*Lift up your heads, O you gates.*” (Psalm 24: 7) Let us head straight to heaven. I wish to hear the trumpet of the prophet call in loudly: “Lift up, you heads of the air, the gates that you set up in the peoples’ minds...”³

St. Augustine

St. Ambrose comments on the phrase, “*Lift up your heads O you gate, and be lifted up, your everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in*” (Psalm 24: 7), saying,

¹ On Ps. 55.

² City of God 11:1.

³ On Ps. 24.

[A new way had to be set up before the new “Conqueror,” for He is as He had always been greater than anyone. Yet, although the gates of righteousness, those of the Old and the New Testaments, through which heavens are opened, are everlasting gates, truly unchangeable, they, nevertheless were lifted up, as the One who is entering, is not a man, but the whole world, represented by the Savior of all...

The angels, realizing the approach of the Almighty, the First and only Conqueror of death, they ordered the heavenly hosts to lift up the heads of the gates, saying in love and worship, “*Lift up your head, O you gates, that the King of glory may enter*”¹ .]

As heaven is opened before believers who are united with our Lord Jesus, to be lifted up with Him to His heavens, they live here in true peace, and in trust in the Savior; thus the prophet says, “*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.*” (Is. 26: 3)

A wonderful expression of the perfect comfort granted by God to His true believers. He gives them peace, followed by peace, until they reach the ultimate conquest, because of their trust in Him.

By those whose minds “*are stayed on You*” he means those with steadfast goal, or those with balanced unshakable minds, who are not forced, by the storms of events, to lose their trust in God, Jehovah, “*the Rock eternal*” (Is. 26: 4; Psalm 18: 31)

“Trust in the Lord forever, for YAH, the Lord, is everlasting strength” (Is. 26: 4)

❖ Miserable are the people who deviate from God... As to our peace, we enjoy with God in faith, now, and face to face in the eternal life².

St. Augustine

❖ Every one of us should reform himself; live in peace with himself, with no schism in his conscience. For if man makes peace with the whole world, but not with himself, he gets no benefit; while he, who makes peace with himself, would be as though he did that with the whole world, and would be honorable in the eyes of the Master of all.

❖ Have compassion, O Lord, on the soul flared with love for You, as it is a dwelling place for peace. Do not leave a trace of sin in the conscience, where You dwell, but burn it with the fire of Your love³.

St. John El-Tabaisy

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، 727-729.

² *City of God* 19:26,27.

³ الحب الإلهي، ص 965.

2. FALL OF THE ENEMY

“He brings down those who dwell on high. The lofty city He lays it low, He lays it low to the ground, He brings it down to the dust. The foot shall tread it down. The feet of the poor and the steps of the needy” (Is. 26: 5, 6)

If Babylon arrogantly thought of itself as dwelling on high, God will cast it down to the dust, to be trampled by the feet of the poor; she previously trampled under its feet. That would be the ultimate end of all the proud who oppose the truth; he would drink from the same cup that he offered to others.

God’s permanent work is to glorify the humble humiliated Jerusalem, to set it as His own city, and to lay low the haughty Babylon. And as St. Mary said: *He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent them empty.*” (Luke 1: 52, 53)

❖ You taught me the ways of humility, through which humans return to life, having fallen because of pride¹.

St. Augustine

❖ Through pride, we lean on wind, and with it we jump into rough sea. Do not get infected with the germ of pride; do not get robbed by the enemy.

❖ In a man of humility, the spirit of wisdom dwells.

St. Ephram the Syrian

3. SUPPORT OF GOD TO HIS RIGHTEOUS

In this psalm, the prophet present to us a magnificent portrait of the righteous man, who finds his pleasure, his protection, and his glory in the Lord. At the same time he calls upon us to practice praying in our secret place, together with commitment to God’s laws and abiding to His commandments, in order to enjoy His free salvation.

a. God’s laws and commandments are not a heavy burden on the soul of the righteous; that is why he seeks and desires them with joy and pleasure of heart, saying, ***“Yes, in the ways of Your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for You.” (Is. 26: 8)*** As if the commandment or the word of God is the object of hope, pleasure and joy of the soul. The psalmist says, *“I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will delight myself in Your statutes... Your testimonies are my delight and my counselors”* (Psalm 119: 14, 16, 24)

The righteous rejoices in God’s commandments because he discovers in their depths an encounter with Christ the Word of God, and an enjoyment in Him as salvation and life. **St.**

¹ On Ps. 16.

Augustine says, [We should understand that there is no faster, higher, shorter, or safer way, than that of Christ, concerning the statutes of God, *“In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”* (Colossians 2: 3) That is why the Psalmist says, that in Him he rejoices, as one rejoices in great riches. These are the testimonies by which he emphasizes to us to what extent Christ loves us.¹]

b. The source of the righteous’ delight is his union with God, his Savior, holding Him fast: ***“The desire of our soul is for Your name, and for the remembrance of You. With my soul I have desired You in the night. Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early.”*** (Is. 26: 8, 9)

The soul realizes that in the night of this world, she is in need of the light of the Savior to shine on and in her. She seeks Him by night, after tasting bitterness all the daylong. She desires to encounter Him within her, to find in Him her comfort, peace, and satisfaction, desiring *“the kisses of His mouth”* (Song 1: 2); saying to Him, *“His mouth is most sweet. Yes, He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”* (Song 5: 16)

The soul desires to keep close to Him all through the night of this world until eternity shines on her, to stay eternally in His bosom.

She seeks Him within herself, to find Him seeking her; goes early to Him, to find Him coming early to her; addresses Him: *“O God, You are my God. Early will I seek You. My soul thirsts for You. My flesh longs for You, in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory”* (Psalm 63: 1, 2) To hear Him answering her: *“I love those who love Me; and those who seek Me diligently will find Me. Riches and honor are with Me, enduring riches and righteousness.”* (Proverbs 8: 17, 18)

c. The destiny of the righteous will be his enjoyment of the divine glory, something the wicked would be denied, of whom the prophet says, ***“In the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.”*** (Is. 26: 10)

The righteous will enjoy the glory of God; He will reflect His splendor to turn into an icon of Him, while the wicked will be denied this eternal gift.

❖ Blessed thrice, and even multi-blessed, will be those who are counted worthy of that glory! While the wicked, as the prophet says, ***“will not behold the majesty of the Lord.”*** (Is. 26: 10 LXX) God forbids that we get denied beholding His majesty. For then, the time would come to say to ourselves: ‘It would have been better for us not to be born!’ Why are we living? Why are we breathing? What would we be if we fail to behold that majesty of the Lord? If those who cannot see the sunlight, count life as more bitter than death, how would it be for those

¹ On Ps. 16.

who get denied beholding that splendor?¹

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ It is fitting to understand that for the sake of this perfection “*We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*” (1 John 3: 2) We shall be granted this gift when it will be said to us: “*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth.*” (Matthew 25: 34) At that time, those on the left will go to eternal suffering, while those on the right will enter into eternal life².
- ❖ St. John says, “*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*” (1 John 3: 2) This likeness is beginning to be realized in us as from now; while the inner man is being renewed day after day according to the image of his Creator³.

St. Augustine

So will it be, that God will become the mystery of glory of His righteous, not only in the world to come, but their glory will start now within them, through beholding the glory of God and His splendor, as a sort of an pledge of the eternal face to face encounter with Him. For His believers, He will be the King of peace; while, for those who deny Him, He will be a consuming fire; as the apostle says, “*To the one, we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life.*” (2 Corinthians 2: 16)

For this the prophet proceeds to say,

“*Lord, when Your hand is lifted up, they will not see. But they will see and be ashamed for their envy of people. Yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them. Lord, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us.*” (Is. 26: 11, 12)

God raises His hand to chastise His children, for their sins⁴, to grant them peace and growth. As for the wicked, the punishment would be a consuming fire, “***to wipe out all memory of them.*” (Is. 26: 14)**

4. HIS PEOPLE PASS THROUGH TROUBLE (DISTRESS)

The prophet realizing the blessings of distress for the people of God, says, “***You have increased the nation, O Lord, You have increased the nation. You are glorified. You have expanded all the borders of the land. Lord, in their trouble they have visited You. They poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them.*” (Is. 26: 15, 16)**

It is as though God’s chastisement causes distress from outside, yet it results to

¹ In Loan, hom 12.

² On the Holy Trinity 14:19:25.

³ On the Spirit and the letter, ch. 37.

⁴ St. Chrysostom: In Heb. Hom 5:5; the Paralytic let down through the roof 6.

continuous growth in glory.

The cause of strength is not in the distress, but in the hidden hand of God, capable of raising from the dead. The prophet saw his people like a woman writhing in the pains of labor; to deliver, after all the trouble, only wind; namely nothing. With the intervention of God, though, even if man, in his pains, reaches to death, God is capable of granting him resurrection, of giving him a new resurrected life, filled with joy and praise.

The wicked suffer as though in labor, to give birth only to wind or vain pride, while the children of God also suffer, yet they give birth, with the spirit of God, to a likeness of Him. Pain outside the Lord Christ delivers wind, while in Him it delivers resurrection!

The Prophet says, "*As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs, when she draws near the time of her delivery, so have we been in Your sight, O Lord. We have been with a child, we have been in pain. We have as it were, brought forth wind.; We have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth... Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall rise.*" (Is. 26: 17 - 19)

The Psalmist says, "*The kings assembled; they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marveled. They were troubled, they hastened away. Fear took hold of them there; and pain as a woman in travail.*" (Psalm 48: 4 - 6)

St. Augustine¹ sees that the kings are the believers who conceive of the fear of God, and enter into a condition of labor, to deliver salvation through faith. When we see their pain, we expect a new birth, as the old man dies together with all his works, and a new man with the image of his Creator is born.

St. Augustine addresses the virgin soul, attached to Christ, her Groom, saying, [Good for you, O virgin soul... with your virginity you keep in your heart whom you have given a new birth (the new man); and keep in your body whom you have delivered, as you have conceived of the fear of God, and given birth to the spirit of salvation².]

5. GOD THE SAVIOR OF HIS PEOPLE

As, God gets angry, not to avenge Himself, but to chastise, proclaiming His love for our salvation, He called the duration of His wrath "*a little while*" that soon passes by, anticipating to reward His believers, while the wicked would drink from the cup of their evil, they filled up by themselves.

Our whole life, with its pains, is but "*a little while*" that soon passes by, not to be compared to a glorified limitless eternity with no end. That is why **St. Augustine** says; [There is a comfort in death, of which the prophet says, "*Come, My people, enter your chambers, and*

¹ On Ps. 48.

² On the Holy Virginity 39.

shut your doors behind you. Hide yourselves, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past.” (Is. 26: 20)¹

How wonderful to end this praise of resurrection by the magnificent phrase: **“See, the Lord is coming out of His dwelling to punish...” (Is. 26: 21)**. He is a heavenly Father, who does not like to punish, yet, if He chastises, He is as though He comes out of His place, that is to say out of His compassionate mercy. It is our transgression and rebellion that make Him, as though coming out of His place to punish. Even, in His coming out, He seeks to embrace us, to get us back to the throne of His mercy.

¹ Ep. 36:31. Ep. 36:31.

CHAPTER 27

DESTRUCTION OF LEVIATHAN

If God comes out of His place to punish, in this, He is not seeking the destruction of sinners but of sin. He does not seek getting into a fight with humanity, but with the devil, that ancient twisted serpent, the reptile monster of the sea. He gets into a unique battle through the cross, the sword of Truth, the slayer of evil, and the Grantor of life to His people.

1. **The slaying of Leviathan** 1.
2. **Protection of the beloved vineyard** 2-9.
3. **Striking the enemy** 10-11.
4. **God gathers His people** 12-13.

1. THE SLAYING OF LEVIATHAN

“In that day the Lord with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea.” (Is. 27: 1)

Some scholars see in the expression *“In that day”* a reference to the last day, in which God strikes the devil, His final and devastating strike, through the enjoyment of the Church of the eternal life, and the destruction of the evil one. The followers of the Millennium Kingdom regard it as the day of the Millennium kingdom, in which the authority of the devil will be destroyed. We, on the other hand, see it as the day of the cross, namely the day of redemption, in which the Lord reigned on the cross, and in which: *“Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against 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.”* (Colossians 2: 14, 15) The spiritual Millennium kingdom began by the crucifixion of the Savior.

As I previously said, the tendency of certain exegetes, to apply the prophecies of Isaiah, concerning the Messianic age, to the Millennium kingdom, is a natural fruit of the fact that Christians of the present age are not tasting the power of the cross in their life, are not experiencing the divine authority over the devil and his works, and are not in touch with the victorious inner life, filled with joy and exalted peace.

What is that fierce sword by which God punishes Leviathan, but the word of God, the sharp double-edged sword coming out of His mouth (Revelation 1: 16; Hebrew 4: 12)?

Through the word we encounter the Lord Christ Himself (the incarnate crucified Word of God), hidden behind the letters and words, Who continuously works for our salvation. And as **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, [The Son of God is living and active, working day after day, for

the salvation of all¹.]

Punishing the serpent with the sword, or slaying the sea monster, means that the incarnate Word of God, our crucified Christ, dwelling in us, is taking over the leadership of the fight, to condemn every evil in us, to destroy every darkness and to establish in us the kingdom of light.

- ❖ The whole world, as we see, brethren, is conquered... not by a military might, but by the ignorance of the cross... When His body was lifted up on the cross spirits submitted to Him².

St. Augustine

- ❖ The Lord robbed the authorities and rulers, and took them over by His cross. For that the Lord came, to cast them away, to gain back man, His dwelling place and His temple³.

St. Macarius the Great

In our study on *'The Holy Spirit, between the New Birth and the Continuous Renewal'* we saw how the office of Baptism, which is actually an enjoyment of dying with the Lord Christ, of being buried with Him, and of the power of His resurrection, is based on two main lines, which are: Enjoyment of the new man, that is according to the image of his Creator, and the destruction of the works of the old man. That is to say, enjoyment of the Lord Christ, and denying the devil with all his energies and works. In the water of Baptism we are united with our Christ, the crucified King, who destroyed Leviathan, the deceiving serpent, the monster dwelling in the water.

- ❖ After bending your knees, you are asked to utter the following words: 'I deny you Satan'...What happened? What is this sudden strange change? You, who used to tremble in fear, are you rebelling against your master? Are you looking with disgust to his counsel? What brought you to this folly? When did you acquire this boldness?

You say, we have now a sword, a strong sword!

Whose sword is that? Who is your ally? Tell me!

You answer me: We enter in Your service O Christ; That is why we are bold and rebellious, for we have a strong refuge, that makes us higher than the devil. We who used to fear him and tremble before him, do not deny him alone, but together with all his processions.

- ❖ The priests instructed you to proclaim: I deny you O Satan, together with all your works and your processions.

Few words, yet very strong! The angels stand by you; and the unseen hosts are rejoicing for your change, receiving your words, to carry them to the Master of all creation, to have

¹ *Incar, of the Word 31.*

² الحب الإلهي، ص 467-468.

³ الحب الإلهي، ص 469.

them inscribed in the heavenly books¹.

St. John Chrysostom

2. PROTECTION OF THE BELOVED VINEYARD

As God Himself takes over the leadership of the battle He becomes personally involved in it, in order that His beloved vineyard would enjoy His watching over, and caring for it. That is why the prophet says on behalf of God: ***“In that day, sing to her, a vineyard of red wine! I, the Lord, keep it, I water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day.”*** (Is. 27: 2 - 5)

God Himself is the owner of the vineyard, loves and desires it. He is its vinedresser and guard; caring and watering it every moment with His divine blessings. His eyes on it day and night, will not forsake it, will root out and burn thorns from its midst, will reconcile it with the Father through the cross (Romans. 5: 1).

If the Cross has destroyed the devil and deprived him of his authority over believers, it also presented the following blessings:

a. ***“Sing to her, a vineyard of red wine.”*** (Is. 27: 2) To whom was this addressed, but to the heavenly hosts, who apprehended the fruits of the cross in the life of the Church, so their lives rejoiced, and praised God, the Savior of mankind for His amazing work in them, turning the earthly into heavenly ones, and lifting the Church to where the throne is, to join heaven in its praises and liturgies. It became the vineyard, desired by God its Savior, object of the desire of angels and all the heavenly hosts (Revelation 5: 11 - 14).

If praising God is the desire of man’s soul, that is a reaction to God’s love for us, being His desired vineyard, His beloved bride, and His Church in which He desires to dwell. The Psalmist says, *“For the Lord has chosen Zion, He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.”* (Psalm 132: 13, 14) *“This is the mountain which God desires to dwell in. Yes the Lord will dwell in it forever.”* (Psalm 68: 16)

b. A divine guarding: ***“I keep it day and night.”*** (Is. 27: 3) If God sends His angels to protect His people from contemporary dangers He Himself guards them against the deadly strikes of sin. He destroyed the enemy by the cross, not as a historical past event, but as an ongoing and a continuous active divine work. He set His Cross in the midst of His Church to protect her against every strike of the enemy, as long as she is staying in His bosom, and seeking His protection. **St. Ephram** says, [Glory to you, You who set Your cross a bridge over death, for souls to cross from the dwelling of death to that of life².]

c. A continuous care: ***“I water it every moment.”*** (Is 27: 3) He rains on it His free grace,

¹ Cf. Whitacker: Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy, p. 37, 39.

² الحب الإلهي، ص480.

to turn its desert into a divine paradise. That is why it says, “*Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits.*” (Song 4: 16) Whatever I carry of the fruits of the Spirit is His work in me, fruit of His continuous care.

With what does God water His beloved vineyard?

He grants us His Holy Spirit to work in us; grants us His life in us... He gives us Himself!

❖ Generous, is He who grants us the most precious of gifts, His very life!

St. Clement of Alexandria¹

❖ “*We know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.*” (1 John 4: 13) Outside the Spirit, we are foreigners to God, but with the fellowship of the Spirit, we became close to Divinity. Our presence in the Father is not our own doing, but is the work of the Spirit dwelling in us².

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

d. No condemnation: “***Fury is not in Me.***” (Is. 27: 4) Receiving His free gift, and reacting to His grace, it would not fall under divine wrath, but trustingly says, “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*” (Romans 8: 1, 2)

Some believe that the word ‘**fury**,’ should be read here as ‘*hemah*,’ meaning ‘grapes³.’ As He found no good grapes, but briars and thorns or wild grapes, He set the briars and thorns on fire, to give more chance to better fruit production.

e. Burning briars and thorns: “***Who would set briars and thorns against Me in battle? I would go through them in battle; I would burn them together.***” (Is. 27: 4) He took upon Himself the confrontation of the briars and thorns strangling His beloved vines. As He was crucified He carried them on His head, taking away from us shame and curse, to carry for our sake. And as **St. Jacob El-Serougi** says, [He carried the curse of the earth in that crown put on His head. He carried the whole burden of the world bravely. He became a curse, to let the returning heirs be blessed in Him! By His crown He rooted out the cursed seed of the serpent. By the crown of thorns, He destroyed the crown of the devil, who desired to become a god on all creation! By the crown of thorns, He made a crown for the daughter of the Gentiles, the bride whom He betrothed from among the idols, and wrote on her His name⁴.]

f. Making peace with God: “*Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace*

¹ *Paed. 1:9.*

² *Contra Arians 2:42; 3:24.*

³ *R.E. Clements: The New Century Bible comm., Isaiah, p. 220.*

⁴ الحب الإلهي، ص 432-433.

with Me.” (Is. 27: 5) This is the goal of the work of the cross: Reconciling us to God, “When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son” (Romans 5: 10).

❖ The Son of God suffered to make of us children of God, while the son of man (we) refuses to suffer for the sake of continuing his adoption to God!¹

Martyr Cyprian

g. The growth of the (catholic) Church, or the new Israel: In days to come, “*Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.*” (Is. 27: 6)

God probably wanted them not to think of His work with them in terms of the near future, namely, saving them from the Babylonian captivity, but rather to anticipate the distant future when the new Jacob will take root; when the Church of the New Testament, as the New Israel, will be established; that embraced, of the Jews, the disciples, the apostles, and numerous believers, who gave exalted spiritual fruits, that budded and blossomed to fill the world.

St. Irenaeus says, [The seeds were sown in the whole world... From that Jerusalem, Christ and the apostles could bring about fruits².]

h. Chastising His children (Is. 27: 7 - 9): Dealing with them as children, and not as enemies, for the sake of their salvation and edification, saying, “*Has He struck Israel, as He struck those who struck Him?*” (Is. 27: 7) In other words, Has God struck Jacob Israel as He struck those who struck Jacob? When He strikes His people it would be for their edification; while His striking of the enemies, those who struck His people would be to destroy them, as they persist on denying and opposing God. With the same meaning he says, “*Has he been slain, according to the slaughter of those who were slain by Him?*” (Is. 27: 7)

“*In measure, by sending it away, you contended with it. He removes it by His rough wind in the day of the east wind.*” (Is. 27: 8) He still contend with her ‘*in measure,*’ that is to say, allows for affliction, as much she can take, for the sake of chastising her for her sins; even if it seems that He has divorced her and sent her away and delivered her to the rough wind coming from the east; namely to Assyria or Babylon, in the years 722 and 587 B.C.

3. STRIKING THE ENEMY

At the same time as God harshly chastised His children, using Assyria and Babylon, as if He has divorced them, He allows the destruction of the evil enemy, turning Babylon, the fortified city into a desolate place, forsaken like wilderness.

Some scholars believe that the talk here applies also to Samaria. It became desolate, on

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص366.

² Adv. Haer. 4:4:1.

account of the spiritual ignorance of her people, who rejected the worship of God and fell into idolatry (Is. 27: 11 -19).

4. GOD GATHERS HIS PEOPLE

Some see in this a prophecy about gathering the children of Israel at the end of time, when they receive faith in Christ, while others see in it a portrait of God's work along the ages, as He brought His people out of the land of Egypt, then saved them from the Babylonian captivity. Or it may, likewise refer to the new Israel, the Church that gathered nations and peoples to enjoy the risen life.

CHAPTER 28

COLLAPSE OF SAMARIA AND A GLORIFICATION TO JUDAH

The prophet presents a new group of prophecies (Is. 28-33), revealing the worsening social and political conditions. It includes six woes to wicked people in Ephraim, Judah and neighboring nations, who despised God and His word, leaned on foreign human arm, and got back to seek the counsel of mediums and spirits.

This section reveals God's justice. His love for His people and all humanity is without partiality. He does not stand sin, and does not accept defilement in man's life. That is why He brought woes upon Israel and Ephraim, for their spiritual fall, while glorifying the kingdom of Judah that remained sanctified for a while, before following the example of its sister Israel, falling into worse abominations.

- 1. Woe to Samaria** 1-6.
- 2. Revealing and exposing sin** 7-15.
- 3. The need of a Savior** 16-22.
- 4. God's dealings with His people** 23-29.

1. WOE TO SAMARIA

God directed woes to Samaria and Ephraim, allowing Assyria in the year 722 B.C. to invade the land, to destroy the cities, and to captivate a great number of people. That has been a chastisement for Israel beside a practical lesson for Judah. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, were able to ascend to the roofs to watch the heaven reddened by the wrath of God against Israel, as flames of fire consumed many houses of Samaria and its surroundings. Despite that, the kingdom of Judah did not heed the lesson, but committed the same sins of Samaria, and even worse; as revealed in the parable of *Oholah* and *Oholibah* that came in the book of Ezekiel 23, and mentioned here in more details.

The verses 1 to 6 narrate the fall of Samaria that has been built on a high hill, surrounded on all sides by beautiful gardens, to be considered as one of the most beautiful and beloved cities of Palestine¹. The valley below it, extending to the beach of Jezreel, was rich with its vineyards and fruitful fields. Despite the goodness and riches that God granted them, they forsook the Grantor and deviated to the pagan idols worshipped by the surrounding nations. Their worship went hand-in-hand with a loose life of luxury, with numerous abominations, for which God

¹ *Ironside: The Prophet Isaiah, p. 167.*

intended to chastise them. He moved the heart of the king of Assyria to get enchanted by the beauty and wealth of Samaria and its surroundings, and to send a great army to seize it. As for Israel, it leaned on its human arm and forgot its God.

Thinking itself capable of destroying the enemy, it was left with its capital and many of its cities devastated, becoming a clear example for everyone who leans on human arm, disregarding God's care.

The prophet presents a fantastic poetic portrait of the fall of Samaria and the glory of the loyal remnant:

a. The elite of Samaria used to hold permanent banquets, serving wine without limit, drinking and playing, while decorating their heads with wreaths of flowers as a sign of glory.

The prophet sees the city of Samaria, capital of Israel, surrounded by gardens, like the one of these rich people, playing and getting drunk, practicing abominations, while decorating his head with a wreath of flowers. God directs woes to these wreaths, turning them to shame and disgrace, instead of glory and splendor, to get them faded and worthy of being thrown, together with the head that carries them, to the dust, to be trampled underfoot (Is. 28: 2, 3).

b. God sends the army of Assyria, as one strong and mighty man (Is. 28: 2). What happened by the hands of the army of the King of Assyria was not by chance, and not through any human planning nor possibilities, but with a divine permission. He grants them the power, strength and unity to realize His plan to chastise Samaria!

c. He likens the army of Assyria, sieging and humiliating Samaria, to throwing the head of a rich man, adorned with a flowery wreath, forcefully to the dust. Through a hailstorm and a flooding downpour the flowers fade because of the hail, and because of the downpour they are swept forcibly to the earth until it becomes part of the rubbish (Is. 28:2).

d. He likens Samaria to a fig tree before the harvest, to be plucked out of its scanty first fruits in a moment time (Is. 28: 4).

e. If God allows such humiliation for the sake of chastisement, He offers Himself to be a glory and splendor for His believers: ***“In that day the Lord of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people, for a spirit of justice to Him who sits in judgment, and for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.”*** (Is. 28: 5, 6)

God will be our beauty, the crown of our splendor, and also our justice, and the defendant of the poor and afflicted. As the Leader of our battle He will grant us the spiritual victory against the powers of darkness.

Together with the collapse of Samaria, representing the denial of faith God presents Himself as splendor, glory, justice, and victory to the loyal remnants of His people (Is. 28: 5);

Here, the following is to be noticed:

a. He says, “*In that day,*” the day of redemption, the Lord carried our shame on the cross, become Himself our crown. He received death for our sake, to grant us His life, His resurrection, and His righteousness. He became weak to grant us through His weakness the strength of conquest.

St. John Chrysostom speaks of the cross as a sign of glory and strength, saying,

[The Cross is glory. Look at what the evangelist says, ‘*for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*’ (John 7: 39)]

The cross has abolished the enmity between God and men, presenting reconciliation; turning earth into heaven; gathering angels together with humans; destroying the fortress of death; weakening the power of the devil; quenching the authority of sin; rescuing the world from transgression and reclaiming truth; chasing away the demons; devastating the temples of idols and canceling their sacrifices; sowing the virtue and establishing the Church!

The cross is the will of the Father, the glory of the Son, and the joy of the Holy Spirit. It is the boast of the apostle Paul who says, “*But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*” (Galatians 6: 14)

The cross is brighter than the sun, of more splendor than its rays. When the sun darkened the cross shone; the sun darkened, not because it was put out, but because the light of the cross surpassed it. The cross breaks our chains, and shakes the foundation of the prison of death. It is the sign of God’s love (John 3: 16)...

The cross is a fortified stronghold, protector for the rich; fountain for the poor; defender for the fallen in the nets; a shield for those in battle; a way to overcome lusts and gain virtues; an amazing and wonderful sign¹.]

b. What is that remnant of His people, adorned by the Lord of hosts, justified and conquering through Him? Some believe that the talk here concerns the kingdom of Judah that remained for a while in a condition better than that Ephraim. While others see that these remnants are those who received faith in the crucified Lord Christ: like the apostles, the disciples, the Marys, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodimus etc. Others still see them as the remnants, who will be saved in the days of the antichrist, as the world gets overcome by a spirit of apostasy, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Matthew 24: 22).

This remnant will embrace every soul that hastens to the Savior, the Lord of Hosts, to hide in Him, and come under the shade of His cross, whenever is the time!

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 378-380.

2. REVEALING AND EXPOSING SIN

Having spoken of chastising Ephraim, he resumes his talk about the sins of Judah, saying, “*And these also*” (Is. 28: 7) to reveal and expose the extent of its corruption:

a. “*The priests and prophets have erred through intoxicated drink. They are swallowed up by wine.*” (Is. 28: 7) As the leaders in Samaria, capital of Israel, got corrupted by wine, so the religious leaders in Jerusalem were in the same boat.

The ‘prophet’ here refers to the (false prophets), who prophesied on their own, to flatter the corrupt priests and the religious leaders. Those, as mentioned in the book of Jeremiah, were speaking in deceiving tender words, telling the people that Jerusalem is in peace and prosperity will not see the sword and shall not have famine. That was a natural fruit of rejecting the word of God, and preoccupation with material benefits.

If that was the case with the priest and the prophet, how would it be with the people?

b. “*They err in vision, they stumble in judgment.*” (Is. 28: 7) If the priest and the prophet staggered by wine, they would lose their spiritual consciousness and would offer false visions, bringing confusion to the people, because their inner insight gets darkened.

In other words, every sin will lead to another. When the priest and the prophet get preoccupied with banquets and life of luxury, they would fall to excessive drinking, that would corrupt their inner insight, to offer deceiving visions, then lose their ability for fair judgment, and are unjust.

c. “*For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that no place is clean.*” (Is. 28: 8) The prophet sees how the city got filled with banquets, and how all people got preoccupied with eating and drinking without limit, to the extent that they vomit because of excessive eating, then go back to eat more; which was the way of the Romans. The whole city became covered with vomit and filth, that there was not a spot where one can get rest. This portrait reveals the spiritual situation of Judah, where the false prophets vomited prophesies on their own, and filled the place with uncleanness and filth.

This is how a loose man would end up, when lusts fill all his being, his soul, heart, mind, feelings, beside all his energies and gifts, with abominations, to turn into what likens a corrupt city.

As man corrupts life, and the Holy One finds no place to find rest among us. Then, the Savior would say, “*The Son of Man has no place to lay His head.*” (Matthew 8: 20) Yet despite that He came to lay His head on the cross, to let us find for ourselves a place in the bosom of the Father.

As our inner self gets filled with filth, the Lord would be told: “*No place is clean,*” (Is. 28: 8) instead of saying, “*Let my lover come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits.*” (Song 4:

16)

Nevertheless, the Savior yearns to set for us a place in Him, saying to us: *“Here is a place by Me and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by.”* (Exodus 33: 21, 22)

d. In their drunkenness, the priests and the prophets began to mock the prophet Isaiah, saying, *“Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts?”* (Is. 28: 9) As though, they are saying that they are people of knowledge, so how come he is trying to teach them things! Let him go to those just weaned from their milk to present to them his prophecies, which only fit for simple immature people.

“For percept must be upon percept, percept upon percept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little.” (Is. 28: 10) As though the prophet is talking to little children, repeating to them his orders and commandments, and offering them simple things.. As if he is like someone holding a child’s hand to teach him how to walk, taking him to the right then to the left, a portrait of how the priests and the prophets were mocking Isaiah and his prophecies!

Now, how would these people be punished? The prophet Isaiah says, *“with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people.”* (Is. 28: 11) As they mocked the words and prophecies of the prophet, and saw him as though addressing newly weaned babies, God will send on them an enemy with strange tongue, to scream in their faces words they do not understand, to become as children with no knowledge. As they refused to learn from Isaiah, and mocked him, God will send on them Assyrian masters, who will teach them through the language of violence, together with servitude and humiliation.

“To whom He said, ‘this is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest, let the weary rest,’ and, ‘this is the refreshing’ - Yet they would not hear.” (Is. 28: 12). They did not wish to listen to the voice of God, telling them that His rest is in our giving rest to those burdened with troubles. The priests and the prophets cared for outer formalities, far more than for giving rest to God, Himself - who finds, in His people - “a place for repose.”

❖ It was said by the prophet: *“This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest.”* (Is. 28: 12) Provide that rest, O man, for the Lord, then you would not need to plead to Him to forgive you. Give rest to the weary, visit the sick, and give food to the poor, for that is actually a prayer... All the time you provide God with rest, is actually a prayer... Beware, beloved brother, when you get a chance to provide God’s will with rest, to say, now is the time to pray; I shall pray, then work!¹

¹ Demonstration 4 on Prayer, 4.

Fr. Aphrahat

Let them listen to the voice of the Lord, and speak to Him, not with the language of formalities, but with that of practical obedience to God in His children. Let them learn this as children, practice it, and forget that they are priests and prophets of knowledge, in order to avoid **“falling backward, and be broken and snared and caught” (Is. 28: 13)** that would lead to sure death.

These people would mockingly boast: **“We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, it will not come to us. For we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood we have hidden ourselves.” (Is. 28: 15)** They proclaim that they fear neither death nor grave, as they entered into a covenant with them both. They know how to resort to lies, to escape falling under chastisements or afflictions, as their law is falsehood.

They symbolize the antichrist and his followers who enter into a covenant with those of formal worship (Daniel 9: 27), to work with no fear of death or of grave. The work of the Lord Christ is, on the contrary, a destruction of that covenant, to replace it with a covenant with the Father, and an eternal reconciliation with His believers.

3. THE NEED OF A SAVIOR

If the evil one is doing his best to deviate believers away from the Truth, he does that in different ways along all ages, particularly in the days of apostasy (the antichrist); as God Himself, gets on to support His children and believers against this devilish act.

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily.’ (Is. 28: 16)

Thus, in the midst of that dark portrait the prophet Isaiah prophesies about the Messiah, as being the ‘Cornerstone’ and ‘Foundation,’ on which the Church is established.

a. A **‘Foundation Stone’** in Zion: The Psalmist says, **“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing. It is marvelous in our eyes”** (Psalm 118: 22, 23; see also Matthew 21: 42; Acts 4: 11; Romans 9: 33; Ephesians 2: 20; 1 Peter 2: 6, 8).

It is a foundation stone, on which the Church is established; a tested stone, tempted by the devil, so that with His conquest, He would grant us victory; a precious stone beyond any value. It is the cornerstone that bound the Jews with the Gentiles, as two walls connected together through faith in Him¹. Who trusts in Him will never be dismayed... In this way Isaiah presents us with a messianic prophecy revealing the Person of the Lord Christ, His position in relation to the

¹ St. Augustine: *Sermons on N.T. Lessons 1:14,15.*

Church, His richness, His glory, trust in Him, the refuse of exchanging or rejecting Him.

- ❖ The Savior is that chosen stone, rejected by those who were supposed to build the synagogue of the Jews, to become the cornerstone. The Holy Scripture likens Him to a cornerstone, because in Him, the two peoples of Israel and the Gentiles, are gathered together in one faith and one love (Ephesians 2: 15)¹.

St. Cyril the Great

- ❖ Who is He, of whom we talk? *“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”* (Psalm 118: 23) *“Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”* (Ephesians 2: 15, 16)²

St. Augustine

b. On it a spiritual building will be established (Is. 28: 17), ***“I will make justice (its) measuring line, and righteousness (its) plummet.” (Is. 28: 17)*** The building would thus be straight with no twisting, where truth and justice would dwell, as God Himself dwells in it with His believers.

The Church is the living building set upon the Person of the Lord Christ as its foundation, His gospel is the truth, and His cross is the justice joined with mercy.

The gospel and the cross build the Church of Christ straight as a place of security. But those who restore to lies, like the false prophets, the hail would become their refuge, and the flood would sweep away their hidden depths. All their hope would go in vain, and they would lose security. Their covenant with the death and the grave would be abolished. The scourge will bring them down to the ground and they will be trumped underfoot (Is. 18: 28). Every morning and every evening they hear disturbing news, about continuous attacks by the enemy. They never find enough place to stretch themselves when sleeping, or a cover to protect them from the cold.

“For the Lord will rise up as at Mount Perazim. He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His awesome work.” (Is. 28: 21)

Perazim or the Mount of Perazim is a Canaanite name meaning ‘explosions;’ near the Valley of Gibeon (2 Samuel 5: 20; 1 Chronicles 14: 11), probably located today where ‘Ras Sanader’ is. By saying ***“The Lord will rise up as He did at Mount Perazim”*** means that God will knock down His enemies all of a sudden and destroy them completely³. David at the Mount of Perazim said, *“The Lord has broken through my enemies before me, like a breakthrough of*

¹ In Luc. Serm. 134.

² On Ps. 118.

³ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown: Comm. On the Whole Bible, p. 543.

water.” (2 Samuel 5: 20)

And in saying, “**He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon,**” he means that He will do as He did in the days of Joshua against the Canaanites (Josh. 10: 10).

What is that ‘**awesome work**’ God will do, but punishing the sin. God gets no pleasure in punishing, but does it as something foreign to Him, as said by His prophets: “*Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*” (Lamentations 3: 32, 33)

“The Lord is coming out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth” (Is. 26: 21)

Thus, the sinners, especially those who mock the word of God and the prophecies and reject faith in the Messiah, Subject of the prophecies, and Center of the whole Scripture, shall not find mercy or refuge, despite God’s reluctance to punish. He says,

“Now therefore do not be mockers, lest your bonds be made strong.” (Is. 28: 22) By this, he does not mean the chains by which the people were bound on their way to captivity in Assyria and Babylon, but the chains of eternal darkness that bind those who deny faith, and reject prophecies, when the whole earth is punished (Is. 28: 22).

4. GOD’S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE

He likens God to a farmer who does not stop at plowing, breaking up and harrowing the soil, but He starts sowing seeds. If God allows punishment, He is like a farmer who plows the soil and breaks it up and harrows it. Yet He does not stop at this negative work, but He positively sows His Word in the field of this world. God presents Himself as a seed to sow in our hearts, to plant in us His paradise. He knows how to sow caraway (Nigella sativa, that is not threshed with a sledge¹), cumin, wheat, barley, and spelt, each in its proper place and according to its proper way.

It is God’s plantation, His field and vineyard. He cares for us, as He is our God, to whom we belong, **“for He instructs him in right judgment, His God teaches him.” (Is. 28: 26)**

As a farmer, He knows how to manage each crop; some need to be threshed with a sledge, and some need to be beaten out with a rod to rid seeds of straw, and some still do not need this or that (Is. 28: 27). In all that, He does not seek to destroy His crops but to gather them. He is a merciful God even in His chastisements, who seeks what is for the salvation and edification of His children. **“Wonderful in counsel, and excellent in guidance” (Is. 28: 29)**

¹ قاموس الكتاب المقدس، ص 530.

CHAPTER 29

WOE TO ARIEL

This chapter includes the second and third of the six woes, uttered by God on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah: A woe to Ariel (1 to 14), and a woe to those who think of themselves as wiser than God (15 to 24).

The woe to Ariel concerns Jerusalem, that fell under chastisement, when Sennacherib the Assyrian put it under siege, then his army was destroyed by the angel of the Lord; as it also applies to the destruction of Jerusalem on the hands of the Chaldeans, and lastly by the Romans. Likewise, this woe applies to every soul that God wants as His holy city His Jerusalem, supposed to embrace His sanctuaries, yet it instead, indulged in abominations, and faltered between the holy and unclean lives.

The Jews preoccupied themselves with formalities of worship, like caring for the altar of the burnt offering (Ariel), rather than for the inner life of holy faith; that is why they fell under severe chastisement. Yet, although God does not forget the honest remnant, loyal to Him, He looks forward for the return of those who deny faith to the Truth.

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| 1. The second woe to Ariel | 1-8. |
| 2. Prevalence of ignorance among His people | 9-12. |
| 3. Formality of worship | 13-14. |
| 4. The third woe to him who leans upon his own wisdom | 15-16. |
| 5. Valuable promises to believers | 17-24. |

1. THE SECOND WOE TO ARIEL

“Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!” (Is. 29: 1)

The word “*Ariel*” means “the fiery furnace of God,” or “the lion of God,” or “the mighty lion” and is a symbolic name of Jerusalem, being the city that embraces the temple, the altar of burnt offerings (Ezekiel 43: 15, 16), and being the capital of God’s people, like the lion, the King of beasts.

Ironside, sees Jerusalem, that has been previously like the lion of God, has turned into a huge furnace for rising sacrifices, on which its people are sacrificed by their bitter enemies¹.

David, the prophet and king, made Ariel his capital for a long time, and built his palace on the Mount of Zion, on which God’s glory was proclaimed in an amazing way. His son, King Solomon built the temple on Mount of Moriah within Jerusalem; the city therefore became the

¹ *Ironside: The Prophet Isaiah, ch, 29.*

center of collective worship, where sacrifices were offered to the Lord. Yet, after being considered as a lion as far as its spiritual power is concerned, it deserted the true spirit of worship, and got preoccupied with spiritless formalities. Persisting on not repenting, it indulged in abominations, to be worthy of woe.

The people used to come to Jerusalem to celebrate three annual feasts (Is. 29: 1). But God, in His chastisement, turned these feasts into mourning and lamentation (Is. 29: 2).

What does He mean by saying, **“It shall be to Me as Ariel” (Is. 29: 2)**? He probably wanted to proclaim that, in its mourning, it becomes like a furnace, that God allowed to burn, to chastise His deviated people; or probably meant, that although He allowed for its defeat and affliction, yet He would turn it into a fiery altar, on which, its invading enemy, will be offered, as burnt offering to God¹.

He expresses the extent of sorrow that befalls the sieged Jerusalem, saying, **“You shall be brought down, you shall speak out of the ground. Your speech shall be low, out of the dust. Your voice shall be like a medium’s, out of the ground; and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.” (Is. 29: 4)**

Because of its great sorrow, the inhabitants of Jerusalem sit on the dust, as though in a funeral, according to old eastern tradition; its voice comes out as though from the ground. As they found nobody living to consult, they consulted the dead (Is. 8: 19); voices whisper, as though in spirituality, which is a sort of deceit by the demons.

And yet, God in His love intervenes with His mighty arm, to save His city and people against Sennacherib and his army (Is. 37: 33-36), God’s wrath falls on the enemy to scatter them like fine dust in the face of the wind. He portrays this as a symbol of our salvation through the cross, and the salvation of the Church at the end of days from the false Christ:

a. The collapse of the enemy despite its might and great numbers: **“The multitude of your foes shall be like fine dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passes away.” (Is. 29: 5)** These refer to the devil and his angels of great number, fiercely fighting humanity, yet, before the cross, they turn to nothingness.

❖ We should not fear the devil. Although it is a spirit with no body, there is nothing weaker than him. There is nothing stronger than the brave, even if he carries a mortal body!²

St. John Chrysostom

b. Realizing a fast conquest: **“It shall be in an instant” (Is. 20: 5)**, a reference to the exalted capability of the cross to overcome the enemies.

¹ Jamieson, p. 544.

² للمؤلف: هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ ليوحنا ذهبي الفم ص62.

- ❖ In prayer, when you make the sign of the cross on your forehead, demons will not approach you, being armed against them¹.

St. John Chrysostom

c. God's salvation of that damned city is accompanied by signs of nature: ***“You will be punished by the Lord of hosts, with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire.” (Is. 29: 6)*** These signs refer to what happened during the crucifixion of the Lord Christ, the revolt of nature as sun darkness (eclipse) and the earth shook, and also refers to what will occur just before the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ for judgment (Is. 28: 21, 30; 30: 30; Zechariah 14: 1. 6; 2 Thessalonians 6 - 8).

The significance of these signs may be meant as a rebuke to man, whom God set as a master of nature, being in the image and likeness of God. The dumb nature testifies to the salvation works of God, and rebukes man for his disregard of his Creator and Savior.

d. A complete scattering of the enemy, vanishing as though in a dream. When one wakes up, all what he saw disappears, even to become difficult to recall (Is. 29: 7).

“It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams; and look- he eats; But he awakes, and his soul is still empty; Or as when a thirsty man dreams, and look- he drinks; But he awakes, and indeed he is faint, and his soul still craves; So the multitude of all nations shall be, who fight against Mount Zion” (Is. 29: 8)

2. PREVALENCE OF IGNORANCE AMONG HIS PEOPLE

Besides covering their evil life by formalities of worship these people were characterized by ignorance of the word of God, and lack of experience of the power of the commandment in their life.

If the Holy Spirit makes the soul, as though drunk, granting it a heavenly joy, that lets it forget affliction and pain, spiritual ignorance. On the other hand, makes it drunk, through drinking the cup of God's wrath. **The fruits of that ignorance are:**

a. Stunned and staggering (Is. 29: 9): As people were negligent, as far as salvation of their souls is concerned; they adopted a spirit of deep sleep (Is. 29: 10), losing spiritual feelings, alertness, activity, continuous prayers, and encounter with God.

St. John Chrysostom says² that when the apostle Paul accused the people of falling into a spirit of stupor and non-alertness (Romans 11: 7, 8), he depended on quotations of the prophets David and Isaiah, so as not to be accused of doing that on his own.

b. Getting affected with a sort of light blindness, without enjoyment of the work of God.

¹ In Matt. Hom 55.

² In Rom. Hom. 19.

Truth, before them, shone as the sun, yet their weak eyes deprived them of enjoying its light; they were stunned and amazed by it, but without seeing it.

c. Getting preoccupied with luxurious life (Is. 29: 9).

d. Rejecting good counsel: They had prophets among them (Is. 29: 10), as spiritual eyes, by which the people, as well as the leaders could discern the truth, God's will and plan. Because prophets were privileged with visions, they were called 'Seers' (Is. 29: 10); Yet these visions remained a sealed book; either because what it contained was for them something obscure, or because the people were unable to read it.

3. FORMALITY OF WORSHIP

Hypocrisy, or care for formalities and not for the essence of holy life, may be the most dangerous enemy that could face religious people. King Hezekiah did good amendments, yet some people forsook the worship of idols superficially, and not from their hearts. They cared to be praised by people not God and had the image of piety, yet denying its strength.

“These people drew near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me.” (Is. 29: 13)

Origen correlated between people approaching God with their lips and not with their hearts, and the prevalence of ignorance, that is to say, pretending to have spiritual knowledge, while not believing in the Lord Christ, saying, [As prophetic words become like a sealed book, not only for illiterate people, but also for the knowledgeable, God would then say, that the Jewish people draw near to Him with their mouths, honored Him with their lips, but removed their hearts far from Him, because of their disbelief in Jesus Christ¹.]

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that God revealed that defect, not to spite or expose them, but in order to let them be aware of their weaknesses, and return to Him seeking salvation. [His love made Him reveal, both their sins, and their salvation hand-in-hand².]

Of the comments of Fathers on honoring God with the mouth and not with the heart:

- ❖ Many have the understanding on their lips and not in their hearts³.
- ❖ They approached with the body, but stood afar with their hearts. Who were, in their body, nearer to Him, than those who lifted Him up on the cross? Who were more distant from Him, than those who blasphemed Him?... The same people, who were nearer to Him, were far from Him. They were near to Him with their lips, yet far with their hearts⁴.

¹ In Matt. Book 11:11.

² Instr. 1:9.

³ On Ps, 49.

⁴ Ibid 38.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Let us attach ourselves to those who practice peace with their piety; and not to those who pretend to do so, through hypocrisy.
- ❖ It was said: “ *They bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly*” (Psalm 62: 4); and also: “*They flattered Him with their mouth; and they lied to Him with their tongue. For their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant.*” (Psalm 78: 36, 37)¹

St. Clement of Rome

What does that mean? The real tendency of the truth is more valuable than smooth words, in the eyes of God who hearkens to the unutterable sighs. Man can use expressions in a sense contrary to what they apparently sound. The tongue can realize that, according to what the speaker inwardly intends, but, as far as the intention of the soul is concerned, that is up to God - who is aware of mysteries - to see².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

4. THE THIRD WOE TO HIM WHO LEANS UPON HIS OWN WISDOM

One of the signs of hypocrisy is that some of the elite, have put in their hearts, to realize their own counsel, namely resorting to Egypt against Assyria; hiding their intentions, not only from the people, but from God Himself, saying, “***Who sees us; and who knows us?***” (Is. 29: 15) They, the mere clay, assumed that they are wiser than their Potter! God, the Potter - in His modesty - wishes to debate with man, the clay; while the clay, in its pride, assumes that it can prudently act, behind the back of its Potter, far from debating with Him.

St. Martyrus the Syrian, says, [How great and limitless, is God’s grace and compassion! God descends to the level of sinners, men and women. God in His goodness, debates with His rebellious slaves. The Holy One invites the unclean to gain forgiveness. Humanity, created out of clay debates with her Creator. Clay challenges its Potter. Let us then, show awe, when we, the sinners, stand in the presence of that great One, to speak with Him³.]

5. VALUABLE PROMISES TO BELIEVERS

If the hidden deceiving plans, full of hypocrisy, bring about sorrow and sadness, God’s proclaimed salvation, on the contrary, brings about a series of joys, and limitless blessings, such as:

- a. Fruitfulness: “***Is it not yet a very little while till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?***” (Is. 29: 17)

¹ Ep. 1:15.

² Adv Eumon 1:37.

³ Martyrius: Book of Perfection 5.

God's proclaimed work turns Lebanon into a fertile field or a paradise; turns the dry and rough heart of man into the kingdom of Christ, full of the fruits of the Spirit. While, deprivation of God's grace would destroy even man's natural fruits (the forest) and turns them into a wilderness.

b. The gift of hearkening the voice of God, and beholding the divine mysteries: ***"In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness."*** (Is 29: 18) The spiritual hearing and the inner insight are gifts from God.

c. Enjoyment of the heavenly inner and increasing joy: ***"The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."*** (Is. 29: 19)

d. Destroying the devil and all his works, that mocker of the believer (Is. 29: 20).

e. Abolishing offenses, snares, and evil counsels, against the righteous children of God: ***"Who make a man an offender by a word, and lay a snare for him who reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of naught."*** (Is. 29: 21)

f. Casting away shame and disgrace: ***"Jacob shall not now be ashamed, nor shall his face now grow pale"*** (Is. 20: 22)

g. Hallowing God's name: ***"But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will hallow My name, and hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and fear the God of Israel."*** (Is. 29: 23) As though in them, the words *"Hallowed be thy Name"* will be realized, God's name is hallowed in His people and believers.

h. Altering human nature, to harbor prudence and knowledge, not with a pure intellectual way, but as a new life, obedient to God, after walking for so long in the folly of ignorance, and life of rebellion (Is. 29: 24).

These are all God's promises to be enjoyed by the Church of the New Testament: rejoicing with God's joy, bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit, as being the paradise of Christ; enjoying listening to the divine voice, and seeing His divine mysteries, in place of blindness; destroying the devil and all powers of darkness; overcoming offenses, with no feelings of shame or disgrace; and lastly, hallowing God's name, through spiritual understanding, and obedience, set upon spiritual knowledge.

CHAPTER 30

LEANING UPON PHARAOH

In the previous chapter God called upon them to return to Him in peace, trusting in His salvation, instead of leaning upon human arm, mere human wisdom, and worldly possibilities (Is. 29:15).

Now He is warning them against leaning upon Pharaoh, disregarding the factor of God's work; proclaiming to them that human counsel will end up in their shame and collapse. Yet, God stays waiting for a chance to proclaim His mercy, through terrifying Assyria that terrified them; as though to reveal the betrayal of Judah, despite God's honesty and love.

Some scholars believe that the talk here is directed to Ephraim, rather than to Judah, as there had been a mention in 2 Kings 17: 4 of an alliance between Hosea son of Elah, king of Israel (Ephraim), and 'So,' king of Egypt, with a revolution against Assyria together with an abstention to pay tribute to its King. But the rest of the talk was directed to Judah and Jerusalem; as a divine warning to anyone who disregards God and lean on human arm.

1. **A warning against leaning upon Pharaoh** 1-7.
2. **Chastisements because of despising God's commandment** 8-17.
3. **God's compassion toward His repentant people** 18-26.
4. **God's wrath upon Assyria** 27-33.

1. A WARNING AGAINST LEANING UPON PHARAOH

“Woe to the rebellious children,’ says the Lord, ‘who take counsel, but not of Me, and who devise plans, but not of My Spirit. That they may add sin to sin; who walk to go down to Egypt, and have not asked My advice, to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt.” (Is. 30: 1)

In this fourth woe, it is to be noticed:

a. He calls them *‘rebellious children,’* because they rejected the counsel of God, their Father, and did not trust Him, considering Pharaoh their father, who would rescue them. Our adoption to God is not just words, nor mere emotions, but is an encounter with Him, leaning upon Him, and an entrance in deep relationship with Him; an adoption that would judge us if we do not act as is worthy of it.

b. *“Who take counsel, but not of Me” (Is. 30: 1);* that is to say, they consulted each other, without seeking the counsel of God nor His honest ministers.

c. **“Who devise plans, but not of My Spirit” (Is. 30: 1)**, namely, they tried to hide their plans from the Lord, and to do their work in darkness; so depriving themselves of the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

d. **“Add sin upon sin.” (Is. 30: 1)** They slid into a series of sins, starting with a rebellion against their heavenly Father, on assumption that He is incapable of protecting them; took each others’ counsel, disregarding His counsel; then tried to cover up their actions, etc.

e. **“Who go down to Egypt, and have not asked My advice” (Is. 30: 2)**; having dispatched messengers to Pharaoh to make alliance with him. They rejected God who lifts them up to Him; as they *went down* instead of “going up” or elevated to heaven. Children of God never **“go down,”** to worldly love (Egypt), but practice continuous growth, to go up every day toward the heavenly life, saying, *“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.”* (Micah 4: 2)

f. **“The strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and trust in the shadow of Egypt shall be your humiliation” (Is. 30: 3)**. Their messengers reached Zoan and Hanes, seeking help and counsel, to get instead, shame and disgrace.

Zoan, capital of Upper Egypt, on the eastern bank of the Nile Delta, had been fortified by the kings and made a capital to watch any aggression that might come from the east over Egypt. In that city Moses dealt with Pharaoh (Psalms 78: 12, 43); later occupied by the Assyrians; and was called Tanis by the Greeks. Nowadays, it is called Sa-Elhagar.

Hanes, 50 miles south of Memphis, on the western bank of the Nile, called Heraculopolis in the time of the Greeks and the Romans¹, is known nowadays as Ahnas or Ahnasia.

The prophet likens the messengers coming from Judah, and going to Egypt, to Behemoth (beasts of the South Is. 30: 6) - a certain kind of Egyptian crocodiles *“Hippopotomus,”* who came to seek help out of a land, burdened with hardships and afflictions, incapable of helping itself; from a land, full of “lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes;” came carrying Pharaoh’ presents on the backs of donkeys and camels.

They came to seek safety in an area of trouble and dreadful dangers.

He calls Egypt by a poetic symbolic name, ***Rahab-Hem-Shebeth*** (Is. 30:7), or ‘Rahab the ‘do-Nothing.’ *‘Rahab’* meaning ‘Spacious, Great, or Proud;’ as Egypt arrogantly offered attractive, yet false promises; and instead of getting to help and support the kingdom of Judah, it “did nothing,” and watched Judah going to captivity to Babylon.

The prophet Isaiah, so warned the kingdom of Judah, who in folly and blindness, sought help and protection from the arrogant Egypt.

¹ قاموس الكتاب المقدس، ص 285.

2. Chastisements, because of despising God's commandment:

God instructed the prophet Isaiah to write down a warning to the people of Judah, on a big tablet, to be seen by all, in a public place, and to inscribe it on a scroll to be an everlasting witness for the days to come (Is. 30: 8). He probably wrote in that tablet the word '*Rahab, the do-nothing,*' to warn them of leaning upon Pharaoh (Egypt) who is sitting down only watching, but in the scroll he wrote down the sins of Judah, and the prophecies and visions that were given to him by God.

The main sin of Judah had been, that they were a "*rebellious people, deceitful children, unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction,*" and received the prophecies of the false prophets. The law had been to them, bitter and harsh, as it exposed their sins and called upon them to walk along the narrow divine way. That is why they said to the seers: "*Do not see,*" and to the prophets, "*Do not prophesy to us right things. Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits,*" (Is. 30: 10) for the sake of getting a temporary peace of mind, through disregarding the sin, and calming the consciences. They requested the prophets to "*Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting (them) with the Holy One of Israel.*" (Is. 30:11)

The fruit of their rebellion, of their rejection of the true prophets, and of the Holy One of Israel, "*this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant. And He shall break it like the breaking of the potter's vessel, which is broken in pieces. He shall not spare. So there shall not be found among its fragments a shard to take fire from the hearth, or to take water from the cistern*" (Is. 30: 13, 14)

The prophet portraying the destruction of Judah, for their rejection of the Lord's counsel, tells them: "*In returning and rest you shall be saved. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.*" (Is. 30: 15) Namely, the mystery of their salvation would be in their repentance and their return to God, in quietness and trust, their real strength.

Yet, they rejected repentance together with faith in God, saying, "*No, for we will flee on horses.*" (Is. 30: 16) They leaned upon human possibilities, especially upon horses and chariots of Egypt, assuming that they are capable of swiftly rescuing them. What actually happened was, that the enemy chased them far more swiftly and reached them. But what's bitterer is that they fled before nothing. "*A thousand (fled) at the threat of one; at the threat of five, they shall flee.*" (Is. 30: 17)

The army of Judah threw away their weapons and escaped in humiliation, and were left, "*as a pole on top of a mountain and as a banner on a hill*" (Is. 30: 17) to become a lesson for all generations to come.

When king Hezekiah returned to God (2 Kings 30), turned his face toward the wall and humbly prayed to the Lord, he triumphly overcame death.

3. GOD'S COMPASSION TOWARD HIS REPENTANT PEOPLE

“Yet the Lord will wait, and He may be gracious to you... He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are those who wait for Him.” (Is. 30: 18)

The prophet Isaiah expected them to return to the Lord, to forsake leaning upon human arm, and to wait for God as their Savior. What is so amazing, is that, it was not only Isaiah who was longing for their return, but God Himself, the initiator of love, was likewise yearning to be gracious, and to show compassion, being a Lord of justice who loves His creation. He was waiting to pour a flow of His grace over His prodigal son returning to Him (Luke 15).

The waiting of the Lord, means His future plan for the salvation of many, shown in the following points:

a. Letting His people dwell in Jerusalem: *“For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem” (Is. 30: 19)*; namely letting them enter into the Church of the New Testament, where peace of God will be - (Jerusalem means (Place of peace).

Jerusalem also refers to heaven, *“Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.”* (Galatians 4: 26) *As if our salvation lies in the drawing by God, of His people to heavenly life.*

b. Uprooting sorrow and weeping: *“You shall weep no more” (Is. 30: 19)*; the Church being an image of heaven where *“There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain.”* (Revelation 21: 4) Here, he does not mean the outer crying, but the loss of inner joy.

The Church shares, with her Groom, His passion, which is not separated from His resurrection. In other words, the Church is the kingdom of Christ that carries the sign of the cross, not separated from the resurrection.

It is fitting for us here, to designate between sorrows, according to God's will, and despair, or loss of comfort and peace. Sorrows according to God's will is a spiritual virtue, accompanied with His comfort and exalted peace; while despair, on the other hand, is an abomination revealing a loss of hope, which destroys man's life and will. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [It does not only attacks the body but also the soul itself... It is always a killer that wears out the soul¹.] He encouraged the deaconess Olympus to overcome despair, being a tyrant that wears out the soul².

c. A swift response to prayers: *“He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry. When He hears it, He will answer you.” (Is. 30: 19)* He allows for adversities and afflictions, but, at the same time, He grants bread and water, and does not forsake man in need (Is. 30: 20).

¹ *Dialogue sur l' ame et les passions 4; trans. I. Hausherr, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 120, Rome 1938, 99.*

² *Ep. to Olympias 10:2.*

d. As the Lord Himself becomes a Teacher (John 2: 23), and His Holy Spirit a Leader and Comforter to the Church, one of His blessings is that He grants a spirit of true teaching and straightforward, and un-deviated spiritual guidance. ***“Your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it.’” (Is. 30: 20)***

Teaching and knowledge are gifts from God Himself, who sanctifies the ear to hearken His words, and sanctifies the mind, heart, and feelings to let man, as a whole respond to the will of God, proclaimed through His word.

By that spirit, the early Church lived, believing that God alone is capable of providing laborers for His crop, granting them His grace to utter the word of Truth, and granting those listening to them, the grace to respond and apprehend.

That was what motivated the Fathers of the Church to keep on praying, and practicing the holy life, for the sake of enjoying the gift of divine knowledge.

- ❖ Let us beseech God to allow the word to grow in us, to be able to hearken the holy words, and to have the richness of broadmindedness in the Lord Christ¹.
- ❖ Many people sought to interpret the Holy Scripture... yet, few of them succeeded, as it is very rare to find someone with this grace from God².

Origen

By the ***“hidden teachers”*** in the Church, he probably means the prophets; as by the coming of the Lord Christ, the unique Teacher, light shone on the prophecies, the mysteries of the Old Testament, referring to salvation, were revealed; and the Person of the Messiah, His redeeming works, and His divine role in the life of the Church, were proclaimed.

e. Rejection of the pagan worships with all their luxuries:

“You will also defile the covering of your graven images of silver, and the ornament of your molded images of gold. You will throw them away as an unclean thing. You will say to them, ‘Get away.’” (Is. 30: 22)

As most of the idols were made of wood or ceramic, covered with silver or gold, the work of salvation is to expose what is inside. Man, through the Spirit of God, is granted the power to say, “away with you,” to get it out of the outer cover that hide its defilement, and to drive it out of the believer’s heart, to make it fit to receive Jesus, the Lord of glory, being His sanctuary.

Our Christ bears, from outside, the signs of His passion to look: ***“Has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” (Is. 53: 2)*** Yet,

¹ In Jer. Hom.6:3.

² Sel. Ps. 119:85.

He grants us His incomprehensible inner glories, while the love of the world gives outer attractions when all what inside are uncleanness and corruption.

f. The grace of rain: ***“Then He will give the rain for your seed, with which you sow the ground, and bread of the increase of the earth. It will be fat and plenteous. In that day your cattle will feed in large pastures.” (Is. 30 23)***

The time of the Messiah, in the prophets’ minds, was ***‘the time of rain’*** or that of ***‘plentiful water.’*** In that time, ***“God will cause showers to come down in their season”*** (Ezekiel 34: 26); and rain will make food come from the land rich and plentiful, for man to eat, and for cattle to graze (Is. 30: 23). ***“They will neither hunger nor thirst.”*** (Is. 49: 10) ***“Water will come out from under the threshold of the temple... Along the banks of the river were very many trees on one side and the other.”*** (Ezekiel 47: 1-12) ***“A fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness”*** (Zechariah 13: 1, 2); ***“All the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord”*** (Joel 3: 18; Zechariah 14: 8); ***“There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God.”*** (Psalm 46: 4)

In short, the messianic age is connected to the holy water that quenches the thirst, and turns the wilderness into fertile land. Let believers grow like trees in God’s paradise; cast away defilements, purify the land from pagan worship; and present life and sanctification. That holy water is Baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

❖ As the first water produced life. No wonder that the water of Baptism is likewise capable of granting life¹.

Tertullian

❖ You, Catechumens, were outside paradise; sharing with Adam your first father his exile. But now the door is opened (Baptism as a paradisaal life), to get you back to where you came from².

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

That way, souls, in the messianic age, are quenched, and bodies are satisfied, not through worldly lusts, but through getting sanctified in the Lord, to have everything good, blessed, and pure: ***“The oxen and the young donkeys that work the ground will eat cured fodder, which has been winnowed with the shovel and fan.” (Is. 30: 24)***

The custom was to provide the animals that work the soil with a fodder, a mixture of straw with few grains. But in the messianic age, when everything is plentiful, they will be provided with cured fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel, to rid it of dust and straw

¹ *De Baptismo 2.*

² *PG. 46:416C.*

etc. a sign of our care of the body as a good and holy factor for the kingdom of God.

By the coming of the incarnate Word of God, our look at the body got sanctified; that is why the apostle John condemned those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4: 2; 2 John 7); and the early Church opposed the Gnostic thought that considered the flesh, as a factor of darkness, that should be destroyed

- ❖ The flesh is not the source of evil, but it is the freedom of choice (the free will)¹.
- ❖ The flesh is the dwelling place of the soul².
- ❖ The flesh is the instrument of the Spirit... acting together with the soul³.
- ❖ The Word became flesh, to change our flesh into Spirit... and to sanctify the whole body with Him, as in Him the first-born are sanctified⁴.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

“There will be on every high mountain and on every high hill rivers and streams of waters, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.” (Is. 30 25)

It is as though, even the high mountains and the lofty hills will have enough water. That probably refers to the rich grace of God, that flows, not only over the common and simple people, but also draws kings, rulers, leaders, elite, and honorable to the faith. In the day, when those who deny faith would be spiritually killed, and fall like towers. It was fitting for the Jewish leaderships, to be towers for the world, to behold the kingdom of Christ, and to preach it, but instead, they became opponents of the Truth, so they fell, something that grieved the apostle Paul.

g. A great enlightenment: ***“The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord binds up the bruise of His people, and heals the stroke of their wounds.” (Is. 30: 26)***

As God heals the wounds of the soul and body, completely sanctifying man, with all his energies, thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc.... to carry the image of his Creator, “the true light,” to become a light to the world, a perfect light in the Lord (sevenfold, as a sign of perfection); then he will hearken the voice of the heavenly Groom, saying, “*You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you.*” (Song 4: 7)

4. GOD’S WRATH ON ASSYRIA

Most scholars see, in what is mentioned here, a description of the destruction that befell

¹ *De Mortuis. PG. 46:529A.*

² *De hominis opificio. PG. 44:237B.*

³ *Ibid 161AB; In Christ; resurrectionem 3.*

⁴ *Contra Eunom. 4. PG. 45:637A.B.*

the army of Sennacherib; although Assyria, with its army and leader, represent the forces of darkness that bear animosity toward God, led by the devil himself, who seeks how to break into the Church of the Lord, our inner Jerusalem, to dwell inside the holy temple of our hearts

a. ***“Behold, the name of the Lord comes from afar, burning with His anger, and His burden is heavy. His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue like a devouring fire. His breath is like an overflowing stream which reaches up to the neck.” (Is. 30: 27, 28)***

“Comes from afar,” as He showed and extended His forbearance toward Assyria, hoping that it would eventually leave aside the pride of its heart. He waited long, as His desire is not to punish the wicked, but, for all of them to return to Him. His name is still coming from afar, extending His forbearance toward the wicked, hoping for their repentance.

And as said by the apostle Paul: ***“Or do you despise the richness of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance.”*** (Romans 2: 4)

“The name of the Lord” is dwelling in His Church, proclaimed in the believer’s heart, more close to him than his own soul; As far as the wicked is concerned, it seems to him very far away; he may assume it is not even existing. That name, which is a fortified tower for believers, is a consuming great fiery wrath for the opponents.

The lips of God are dripping fat for His children, but full of wrath for those who deny Him.

His tongue is inviting everyone to His heavenly riches; but is a consuming fire for the rebellious.

His breath grants comfort and exalted peace to the Church. The Lord breathed on His disciples’ faces, granting them the Holy Spirit, to forgive sins (John 20: 22). As to those who deny faith, His breath would be like a rushing torrent rising up to their neck.

He likens the nations to a vain crop of straw with no wheat, or to furious horses with no bridles to control them, saying, ***“To sift the nations with the sieve of futility (of nothingness).”*** (Is. 30: 28) They are sifted, and the sieve would produce nothing. ***“There will be a bridle in the jaws of the people, leading them astray.”*** (Is. 30: 28). The bridle is put in their jaws but still they do not walk in the path of truth.

b. ***‘You shall have a song, as in the night when a holy festival is kept; and a gladness of heart as when one goes with a flute; to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel. The Lord will cause His glorious voice to be heard, and show the descent of His arm, with the indignation of His anger, and the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, tempest, and hailstones.’*** (Is. 30: 29, 30)

The destruction of the enemy became joy for the people, as though on a night of a holy feast... What preoccupies believers is not to see their enemy perish - even the devil himself with

his angels - but to see all obstacles removed from their way to the mountain of the Lord, to come joyfully to heaven itself. Our goal is not in getting pleasure from the destruction of the enemy, but in enjoying God's splendor, and in hearing His voice.

c. Isaiah sees in the return of the people from captivity to Jerusalem what likens a military parade, marching with military music, proclaiming victory: "***And in every place where the staff of punishment passes, which the Lord lays on him, it will be with tambourines and harps; and in battles of brandishing He will fight with it.***" (Is. 30: 32)

d. He presents a final portrait of the extent of destruction of Assyria; describing how the pit of fire (the *topheth*), where the trash was burnt outside Jerusalem, was prepared, and made ready for the king, to burn with the wrath of the Lord (Is. 30: 33).

CHAPTER 31

LEANING UPON HUMAN ARM

Because leaning on human arm is a serious issue that can destroy faith in human life along the ages, there is no wonder that the prophet Isaiah has dealt with it several times from different angles. Here he stresses the danger of descending to Egypt, to seek the protection of Pharaoh, instead of lifting the heart to the Holy God, as the true Stronghold, and Helper of His people.

1. Resorting to Pharaoh 1-3.
2. God, Protector of His children 4-5.
3. An invitation to return to God 6- 9.

1. RESORTING TO PHARAOH

Isaiah presents to us a remarkable spiritual thought. The issue of resorting to Pharaoh, is not just a political military plan, but is a theological issue that touches man's life and his eternal destiny. Who leans on humans, whatever their numbers, possibilities or great strength (Is. 31: 1) attaches himself to mortals, to become like them a mortal; while he, who attaches himself to the Savior, the Holy One of Israel, the unchangeable and the eternal, will have with Him eternity. Our relying on humans will unite us with them to perish, while relying on God unites us with Him to share His eternal glories. That is what he meant when He warned them, saying,

“But the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out His hand, both he who helps will fall, and he who is helped will fall down; they all will perish together” (Is. 31: 3)

Let us then lean on the eternal Creator, not on the weak helpless creation, incapable of helping even itself.

- ❖ *“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.”* (Psalm 146: 3) Through a kind of weakness of the human soul, when man falls into affliction, he gets despaired as far as God is concerned, and chooses to lean on human arm.

If somebody falling in affliction is told: ‘There is someone who can set you free,’ he would instantly smile, rejoice, and his morals will get lifted up. But, if he is told, ‘God will set you free,’ he would fall in a state of despair!

You would rejoice when you receive help from a mortal, so how would you become sad when you get it from the Creator?

When you get a promise to be set free by someone, who himself is in need to be set free, together with you, your morals get lifted up, as though you have got a great help.

Now, you are getting a promise from God who sets people free, and is not in need of anyone to set Him free. Despite that, you despair, as though you are getting nothing.

Woe to them, who harbor such thought, they are misled; they are filled with inside dreadful bitter death.

- ❖ *“His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish.”* (Psalm 146: 4)
“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more. Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.” (Psalm 37: 35, 36)

All those are expected to die, to vanish fast. So, what should we otherwise do instead of asking the help of humans or rulers?

“Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help” (Psalm 146: 5); not this or that man; nor this or that angel.

Jacob had a great helper, God, who made Israel out of him. He is now Israel (the beholder of God)! You too, if you remain here too and do not deviate from beholding God, if you get God as your helper, you will turn from Jacob to Israel, to behold God; then all your troubles, confusions, and sighs will come to an end, leaving their places to joyful praises.

Let your hope be in the Lord your God. Let your hope be in Him¹.

St. Augustine

2. GOD, PROTECTOR OF HIS CHILDREN

If the devil likens a *“roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5: 8), *“the Holy One of Israel”* is *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah,”* (Revelation 5: 5) who does not devour but protects. He grants the soul His royal features, to make out of His believers *“kings and priests”* (Revelation 1: 6), granting them His eternity and fellowship of His glories.

God is trustworthy, capable of protecting and also caring for us; that is why He likens Himself to the lion, the undefeatable king of beasts; and, at the same time, to a bird hovering over its young (Is. 31: 5).

Our Christ cares for us on His cross, like *“a lion that lies down; and as a lion, which shall rouse him”* (Genesis 49: 9), and the enemy can neither approach him² nor us.

3. AN INVITATION TO RETURN TO GOD

The prophet reveals the goal of God’s work. God destroyed Assyria by a supernatural way, not to show off His divine might, but in order to draw the souls of those who deny Him, saying, *“Return to Him, you have so greatly revolted against, O Israelite... Assyria shall fall*

¹ On Ps. 146.

² سفر التكوين، 1988م، ص 377.

by a sword, not of man; and a sword not of mankind shall devour him.” (Is. 31: 6, 8)

Is that not a portrait of God’s salvation, that took place on the cross, where the devil has fallen, not by human thought, nor by a material sword, but through delivering His life as a trespass sacrifice for us, and a burnt offering of love for our credit. Thus the enemy got devastated beneath our feet, and we returned to God with new depths, not experienced by men of the Old Testament.

CHAPTER 32

CHRIST, GRANTOR OF PEACE

This chapter is considered a beautiful end to the talk about the conflict between Jerusalem and Assyria. After repeating the warning against resorting to Pharaoh, and relying on human arm, he presents to us the Lord Christ, as a spiritual King, who grants peace and justice.

- 1. Blessings of the Kingdom of Christ** **1-8.**
- 2. Confusion outside of Christ** **9-14.**
- 3. The Holy Spirit and peace** **15-20.**

1. BLESSINGS OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

The talk here concerns a flourishing kingdom, believed by certain scholars to be that of king Hezekiah, who initiated spiritual and social reforms, although many of them were only superficial. Others believe that talk here concerns the Lord Christ, as these blessings were not realized in the days of Hezekiah. A third group of scholars consider it a talk about Hezekiah, or other kings, as shadows of the Lord Christ.

What does Christ, the King, offer us?

a. Law of justice and righteousness: *“A King will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice.” (Is. 32: 1)* If the Lord has reigned on and through the cross, and paid the price of our sins, in order to realize justice, He is setting His disciples and believers as rulers, to practice our spiritual authority, not on others, but on our own souls, feelings, emotions, and energies; not through destroying them, but through the ‘Truth,’ namely through sanctifying them by Christ, the ‘Truth.’

b. In place of troubles and afflictions, this King will become *“A shelter from the wind,”* of temptations and bitter afflictions; *“a refuge from the storm,”* as a cover to protect believers from torrents of rain; *“like streams of water in the desert,”* to quench the thirst of souls in the dry wilderness; and as *“the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,”* to take refuge in Christ, the Rock, so no harm will come to them.

Thus, he presents four analogies to the work of the Lord Christ in the life of His believers: “a shelter,” “a refuge,” “streams of water,” and “a great rock.”

Through these analogies, the prophet sees us like a traveler, who finds in the Lord Christ all his needs: In case of wild wind, he finds a shelter; In case of storm, he finds a refuge. In case of thirst, the Lord will become to him streams of living water; and in case the entire world comes against him, he takes refuge in Him, as a solid rock, capable of hiding and protecting him from to

death.

In other words, God the Savior presents Himself, as everything for His believers, to keep them from needing anything. He presented Himself through several names, to let us apprehend that He is the Source of our true satisfaction; and as said by **St. John Chrysostom**:

[Why is He called “the Way”? So that we may understand that through Him, we encounter the Father.

Why is He called “the Rock”? So that we may understand that He is the keeper and abider of faith.

Why is He called “the Fountain”? So that we may understand that He is the source of everything.

Why is He called “the origin”? So that we may understand that in Him is the power of growth.

Why is He called “the Shepherd”? Because He shepherds us.

Why is He called “the Lamb”? Because He was offered as a ransom for our sake

Why is He called “the Life”? Because He raised us with Him from death.

Why is He called “the Light”? Because He rescued us from darkness.

Why is He called “the arm”? Because He is one Essence with the Father.

Why is He called “the Word”? Because He is begotten of the Father – just as my word is born of me, He too is the Son born of the Father.

Why is He called “our Garment”? Because in Him we were clothed in Baptism.

Why is He called “the table”? Because on Him I feed, as I partake of the Sacraments.

Why is He called “the dwelling Place”? Because in Him I dwell.

Why is He called “the Groom”? Because He received me as His bride.

Why is He called “the Immaculate”? Because He had me a virgin.

Why is He called “the Master”? Because I am His slave.

When you hear these things, do not take them according to material sense; but lift up your thoughts; as they are not to be understood according to the flesh¹.]

- ❖ Blessed is him, who forgot the talk of the world, listening to Your talk; as in You, all his needs are fulfilled. You are his food and drink! You are His home and place of comfort! To You, he enters any time to find refuge! You are His sun and daylight; with Your light, he can see the hidden things! You are the Father, His Father! You have provided him with the Spirit of Your Son in his heart!²

St. John Saba

¹ To Eutropius, hom.2.

² الحب الإلهي، ص50.

c. The Lord Christ grants His believers the spiritual insight, to behold the unseen things, in order, that their inner eyes would not be dim; he also grants us the ability to listen to His commandments and words with Joy; grants them prudence and knowledge; grants the tongue the fitting and active talk; and finally grants us the grace of discernment, so as not to see the fool as noble, nor the scoundrel as highly respected:

“The eyes of those who see will not be dim, and the ears of those who hear will listen. Also the heart of the rash will understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak clearly. The foolish person will no longer be called generous.” (Is. 32: 3 - 5)

In short, He grants inner insight, listening with obedience, prudence with understanding and knowledge, ability for constructive talk, and grace of discernment. All this are realized through the Savior, who uproots the sin that causes blindness, rebellion, folly, impaired utterance of Truth, and lack of discernment.

❖ My God... You are my Light! Open my eyes to behold Your divine splendor, to be able to walk my way without stumbling in the snares of the enemy.

You are the Light to the children of the light! Your day Knows no sunset! Your light keeps your children from stumbling!

Those outside You walk and live in darkness!

Yes, away from Your light, truth escapes from me, and falsehood approaches me!

I would become in confusion, instead of discernment would have ignorance in place of knowledge; blindness in place of awareness; I would no longer have a way leading to life¹.

St. Augustine

d. God discerns between the nobleman and the scoundrel, as He is aware of the hearts and hidden things (Is. 32: 6 - 8).

2. CONFUSION OUTSIDE OF CHRIST

After taking about the blessings of the Kingdom of Christ, among which is the discernment between the noble and the scoundrel, the first to be rewarded by God, while the second is to be condemned, he started to tell us how that condemnation will be, in the form of an address to spoiled complacent women; who after the harvest go out to enjoy themselves in corrupt and unfitting carnal ways. There would be no more harvest feasts, because the enemy will confiscate all crops.

Those women represent all who deny faith in Christ, who walk outside His spiritual Kingdom. They would suffer the following:

a. Instead of feeling secure, they will tremble (Is. 32: 11).

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 70-75.

- ❖ Be my happiness, O All-goodness... By You I stand aright, and without You I perish!
 You fill me with joy, and without You I die in sorrow!
 Hasten to make out of my soul and of my heart, a dwelling place for You!
 Your fragrance restores my strength, and your presence is my satisfaction! (Ps. 17: 10)
 O, life of my soul... my heart runs after You, and melts down as it counts Your gifts!
 When would be my time to reach Your Kingdom?
 When shall I enjoy Your splendor, O joy of my heart?
 Why are You hiding Your face from me, O the only happiness of my soul?
 Where are You hiding, O Lord of splendor, O ultimate goal of my dreams?
 Draw my heart, O You, my only joy¹.

St. Augustine

b. Instead of valuable garments, they will strip off their clothes, and put sackcloth on their waists (Is. 32: 11), a reference to loss of grace and spiritual security.

What are these valuable garments that clothes human soul, but the Person of the Lord Christ, who hides us in Him, covers us with the security of His blood, and grants us His beauty? And as said by the apostle Paul: *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* (Galatians 3: 27)

In the water of Baptism we put on the Lord Christ, to carry in us His righteousness, His glory, and His splendor; and as **St. Jacob El-Serougi** says, [Baptism is the robe of glory granted to Adam, that has been robbed by the serpent among the trees... Come, O soul, and put on the majesty, and acquire the light through the pure water! Come, descend and put on the garments woven by the Deity, then ascend to show us your new eternal beauty, to let us rejoice with you... Fire and Spirit weave for you a robe of light, O you daughter of the nations, betrothed to the Light within the holy water².]

c. Instead of joy, they will beat their breasts like those who have someone dead (Is. 32: 12). Their souls have lost life by separating from God, the Source of life.

- ❖ O my God, How miserable I am!... When shall I forsake that corrupt nature, and acquire in myself your perfect strength? I am your creation, and here I am dying! I am your handwork, and here I am going down into nothingness! Order the dead to come out of the grave!... O, my God! I shall cry out to You before I perish, or, at least, I shall cry out to You, so as not to perish! To be worthy of dwelling in You, support me, O You, the eternal Glory! O my Joy,

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 38-40.

² ميمر عن المعمودية المقدسة.

reveal Yourself to me, my God, to live!¹

St. Augustine

d. Instead of celebrating the harvest **“on the land of My people will come up thorns and briers;”** (Is. 32: 13) a reference to being cursed with spiritual dryness.

e. **“Because the places will be forsaken, the bustling city will be deserted.”** (Is. 32: 13)

f. **“The forts and towers will become lairs forever, a joy of wild donkeys** (a reference to fierce demons), **a pasture of flocks** (a reference to beastly thoughts)” (Is. 32: 14).

These are the features of a soul outside of Christ: trembling, mourning, suffering draught, devastation, and destruction; to be turned into a dwelling place for unclean spirits, and carnal thoughts.

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PEACE

God, with - His love - seeks those who are His, to cast away from them all trembling, bitterness, draught and devastation; to pour on us His Holy Spirit, so that the devil and the carnal thoughts and lusts would not find a place in us, as it is said: **“Till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field.”** (Is. 32: 15)

Numerous scholars believe that all this refer to the pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost, when the barren wilderness of the soul became a fertile field, that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit, as a pleasure to God and people; while those who deny Him would lose even the natural fruits; their weak field would turn into a desert.

The prophet portrays that Pentecostal work in the life of the Church, saying, **“Justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.”** (Is. 32: 16)

Meaning that the Holy Spirit would turn our desert into a paradise for the Lord Christ (who is the Truth and Justice) to dwell in. If our Christ has promised the gift of the Spirit, the work of the Spirit in the believer is to turn him into a place fit for Christ to dwell in, and to set His kingdom.

“My people will dwell in peaceful habitation.” (Is. 32: 18)

Through the dwelling of the Lord of glory in the midst of His people peace would come. Our Christ would be transfigured in us, and we would dwell in Him. Being our eternal peace, **“Peace of God rules in our hearts”** (Colossians 3: 15), to let us get reconciled with God and also with men, and be counted as those who are in heaven itself.

Finally, the prophet beatifies those who enjoy the gift of the Holy Spirit through Baptism: **“Blessed are you who sow beside all waters, who send out freely the feet of the ox and the**

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 80-83.

donkey.” (Is. 32: 20)

As though he who sows his seeds beside streams of the Holy Spirit will get a plentiful crop, so that cattle and donkeys would never stop ranging free on his land.

- ❖ Blessed is he who sows his seeds beside streams; his soul would get plowed, and watered for the ox and donkey to range free in it, after it was dry with no rain (Is. 32: 20). Blessed is he who is the “*valley of Acacias*” (Joel 3: 18), to be watered out of the Lord’s house, to turn fruitful and productive, after having been barren and fruitless... It is fitting for us to be careful not to lose that grace¹.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

¹ *On the Holy Baptism, 27.*

CHAPTER 33

ASSYRIAN INVASION AND THE MESSIANIC AGE

While the prophet is looking forward to the messianic age, as being a fruitful age, in which the Lord plants His Vineyard (the Church), by the streams of His Holy Spirit, turning the desert into paradise, we see him watching the current events as shadows of that age. Indeed he sees, in the Assyrian invasion of Judah and Jerusalem, a catastrophe for many, yet, there will be an honest and a loyal remnant to enjoy the work of God and His blessings. The devastation that occurred refers to the souls that denied the Lord Christ, rejected His kingdom, and so was denied the work of His Holy Spirit. While the remnant refers to His Church, namely to His joyful kingdom, filled with peace, and increasing spiritual fruits.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| 1. Woe to the plunderer | 1. |
| 2. Taking refuge in God | 2-9. |
| 3. Condemnation of Assyria | 10-14. |
| 4. The king and his kingdom | 15-24. |

1. WOE TO THE PLUNDERER

“Woe to you who plunder, though you have not been plundered; and you who deal treacherously, though they have not dealt treacherously with you! When you cease plundering you will be plundered; and when you make an end of dealing treacherously, they will deal treacherously with you.” (Is. 33: 1)

The woe here is directed against both Assyria and Babylon, as well as against every enemy who shows haughtiness toward God and His people¹. If his plan to plunder and to deal treacherously is realized unopposed, and with no harm on his part, yet, his work falls under woe.

God uses this plunderer as an instrument to chastise His people, up to a point, after which He would, himself, fall under judgment. God will let him realize his entire heart wish for plundering, then to let him drink from the same cup, to get plundered and treacherously dealt with, in due time.

Here we should comprehend that every hand that stretch to plunder will have its work turned against it, and will drink from the same cup it fills for others. Its evil will turn to the good for the children of God, even the devil is incapable of destroying them, but his action against them, will rather become a cause for their victory and beatitude. And as **St. John Chrysostom** quotes the apostle Paul, saying,

¹ J.J. Collins, p. 73.

[“For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Corinthians 11: 19).

That is why God left the wicked in the world, to let the splendor of the good be more prominent. Do you see how great is the gain that is referred to the courage of the good and not of the wicked? The same principle applies to the devil, who was left here by God for our sake, to make us more strong when the fighter is quiet obvious and the better is fierce so if you are asked: Why did God leave him here? Your answer should be: The devil is not only incapable of harming an alert and cautious person, but would also benefit him; not because of good intention on the part of the evil one, but because of the courage of him who turns his evil into good use... Be sure that nobody can harm you, but on the contrary you will be greatly rewarded, not only by the good people, but also by the wicked ones¹.]

The Christians have realized that the devil had utterly collapsed after the cross; he was destroyed after having been a destroyer of the souls.

2. TAKING REFUGE IN GOD

Seeing the extent of the well-deserved suffering of his people, the prophet raises a prayer for the sake of the holy remnant, proclaiming in their name their hope for God’s help. In that prayer,

a. He asked for God’s compassion and His salvation: **“O Lord, be gracious to us; we have waited for you. Be their arm every morning, our salvation also in time of trouble.”**(Is. 33: 2)

In the name of the pious people, the prophet prayed for the military leaderships, who became in distress because of Sennacherib and his army. “Be their arm every morning” is a marvelous expression that reveals the role of God’s salvation in people’s life. He does not disregard their “arms,” even though they are nothing and helpless, yet He works through them as though they are His own; takes them over, sanctifies them by His Holy Spirit, and supports them with a heavenly strength. He works in His believers’ lives, yet without disregarding them, nor canceling their energies; but through sanctifying them.

- ❖ God wants to show that His slave had participated in everything, in order to spare him getting embarrassed².
- ❖ Grace is always ready! It seeks and welcomes those who receive it. Thus, when the Lord sees a watching and a loving soul, He floods it with His richness, far more than what it asked for³.

¹ للمؤلف: هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ ليوحنا ذهبي الفم، ص 73 الخ.

² In Matt. PG. 58:592.

³ In Gen. PG. 53:76, 77.

❖ God wishes from us, just a little excuse, to do all the work Himself¹.

St. John Chrysostom

This divine support is a daily and continuous work in the life of the Church, as well as in everybody's life; *“Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not, new every morning.”* (Lamentations 3: 22)

b. He requested God's intervention. It is enough for God to utter just a word, to drive the Assyrians or any other parties to flee:

“At the noise of the tumult the people will flee. When you lift yourself up, the nations shall be scattered.” (Is. 33: 3)

How much we are in need to have the word of God proclaimed in our hearts, in order to chase away the evil, and to scatter the powers of darkness. When the Crucified is transfigured within us, sins and evil spirits will flee, and God will reign alone in our depths.

By God, appearing on the stage of events, and uttering His word, the invaders became like caterpillars and locusts fleeing in shame and disgrace, to be gathered by the people of God (Is. 33: 4). By caterpillars, he probably meant the dead and wounded of the Assyrian army, gathered by the people to avoid plague; and by locusts, those who ran away, to be chased and caught without any need for weapons. What a shame and disgrace for the enemy who arrogantly and fiercely plundered!

c. Praying for the sanctification of the city, to become the righteous city of the Lord, or the city of righteousness, where God Himself dwells, being ***“justice and righteousness” (Is. 33: 5)***; to be filled with peace, security, and salvation, together with wisdom and knowledge. ***“The fear of the Lord is his treasure” (Is. 33: 6)***; fear out of love, fear of hurting the feelings of the Father (filial fear), and not fear of a slave of his master (servile fear), nor of a laborer of his employer².

Now, having prayed to God on behalf of his people, to intervene to destroy the enemy and save the people, parades before God all what happened to the city, probably to seek His divine compassion for His people (Is. 33: 7-9):

❖ ***“Their valiant ones shall cry outside.” (Is. 33: 7)***

❖ ***“The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly” (Is. 33: 7)***, as Sennacherib broke the treaty; and despite a great ransom paid to him by king Hezekiah to turn away from his land, he sent his forces to invade it (2 Kings 18: 4 - 17).

❖ ***“The highways lie waste” (Is. 33: 8)***; as everyone feared to encounter the enemy on the road the reports of the messengers came to declare that was all over the country. It was a very

¹ In Rom. PG. 60:499.

² Cf. St. Cassian: Conf. 11:13.

serious situation, and the enemy was all over the country.

- ❖ The cities were despised (Is. 33: 8).
- ❖ **“The earth mourns and languishes.” (Is. 33: 9)** The fertile land turned into fruitless wilderness. Fruitlessness and barrenness are considered a disgrace, a sign of God’s wrath. Of these regions were Sharon, Bashan and Carmel.

As the prophet prayed, in the name of the pious for divine intervention, admitting the devastation that befell the land, God hastened to condemn Assyria. As if God is longing to support us against the enemy, and is capable of saving us, yet he expects us to ask for him and seek His work. He does not compel us to do anything, even for the sake of our salvation. He respects our free will to choose to seek His intervention. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says, [God calls us, then waits for us to approach Him with all our free will, to grant us every help¹.]

3. CONDEMNATION OF ASSYRIA

If God has been patient with the wicked, yet when they went too far in their evil, He condemned them:

a. God Himself leads the battle: **“‘Now will I rise,’ says the Lord, ‘now will I be exalted. Now I will lift myself up.’” (Is. 33: 10)** What man is incapable of doing is taken over by the Lord, for the sake of the weak and the offended, considering their enemies His own enemies. It is said: *“Let God arise. Let His enemies be scattered. Let those also who hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away. As wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad. Let them rejoice before God. Yes let them rejoice exceedingly”* (Psalm 68: 1 - 3)

b. What they are condemned for is a natural fruit of their deeds, **“You shall conceive chaff. You shall bring forth stubble. Your breath as fire shall devour you.” (Is. 33: 11)**

Their deeds are straw and thorns, and their threats are fire. they are carrying within them both the fuel and the fire, to turn into a furnace, to consume, not others, but themselves!

If their wickedness, especially hypocrisy, is a consuming fire, they are thus practicing with their free will, a pledge of the eternal condemnation².

As is the case with the righteousness that carries its reward in itself, entering with the soul into a pledge of eternal glory; likewise the evil carries in itself its own reward, entering with it into a pledge of the eternal fire of Hades.

Many Fathers of the Church believe that virtue is in no need for a reward, as it carries its reward within itself; and as said by **St. Justin the Martyr**: [Does not the virtue lead to the

¹ *De verb Habents.*

² *Apolo,gy 2:11:2.*

perfection of happiness?¹]; and as said by **St. Gregory of Nazianzus**: [For virtue to be virtue it should have no reward².] That is probably because the Fathers considered virtue as being an enjoyment of unity with Christ. And as said by the **Origen**: [Virtue is to become one with Christ. He is the virtue that fills Him³, He is Justice, Wisdom and Truth. Whoever practices virtue, partakes of the divine nature; this is his perfect reward.]

Evil, on the other hand, is likening the devil, and partaking of his features, together with a deprivation of enjoyment of Christ and being after His image... In that, is the fruit of sin and its reward.

4. THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM

If God, in His justice, is a fire that consumes evil that carries corruption within it, and glorifies the believers, who carry the righteousness of Christ within them; He condemns the wicked, who are persistent on their evil, and protects the righteous from their hands.

The prophet presents to us the following features of a righteous person:

a. **“He walks righteously” (Is. 33: 15)**; namely walk in Christ Jesus - the Way and Truth, our righteousness.

b. **“He speaks uprightly” (Is. 33: 15)**; his words proclaim his gospel, hidden in his heart.

c. **“He who despises the gain of oppressions.” (Is. 33: 15)**

d. **“Who gestures with his hands refusing bribes.” (Is. 33: 15)**

e. **“He stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed.” (Is. 33: 15)**

f. **“He shuts his eyes from seeing evil.” (Is. 33: 15)**

g. This is the man **“who will dwell on high;”** whose refuge will be, with his Savior in the heavenlies, on **“the fortress of rocks.” (Is. 33: 16)**

h. Generous in giving, even from his needs. **“Bread will be given him, his water will be sure.” (Is. 33: 16)**

Such a man, who is sanctified by the Lord Christ, to live pure with all his feelings, to rise with his depths to the heights; and to practice the life of fellowship with God, and continuous giving, is worthy of enjoying seeing the Lord Christ in His glories, as said: **“Your eyes will see the King in His beauty.” (Is. 33: 17)** This is the greatest gift for the righteous, to behold the Messiah in His splendor!

Some people think that talk here is about king Hezekiah, who enjoyed the privilege of watching the devastation of the army of Sennacherib. Yet, it is obvious that it concerns rather, the Lord Christ who has been glorified on the cross, drawing the nations to Him, granting them a

¹ Oratio 42:12.

² Origen: *Fragmenta in Joannem, IX.*

³ Cf. Henri Crouzel: *Theologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène, Paris I, 956, 239ff.*

new nature; in place of animosity, to carry love and friendship; and in place of voracity, to become meek; and in place of the strange tongue of evil, to utter a heavenly language; as it is said: **“Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?” (Is. 33: 18)**

Where is the scribe who used to count forces and register the names of soldiers? Where is the one who used to collect the taxes to pay the enemy? And where is he who used to count the towers, to assign people to watch on them the movements of the enemy denoting the start of the battle? All these capacities were transformed from military responsibilities, to peaceful ones for the sake of the kingdom of God, through receiving faith in the Lord Christ.

“You will not see these fierce people” (Is. 33: 19), as the fierce deeds of the old man are uprooted, to carry the features of our Creator, through enjoying the new man who is being renewed every day.

“People of an obscure speech... of a stammering tongue that you cannot understand” (Is. 33: 19); have gained a new tongue, that of the Spirit, the tongue of love, of unity, together with prudence and understanding.

And now, what is the work of the King Messiah, in the lives of nations coming to Him to believe in Him?

a. **“Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts.” (Is. 33: 20)** In place of the old terror from the scribe, and the tax collector, Zion will turn into a city of joyful festivals, where people gather together in collective worship, to encounter God Himself, our continuous festival.

b. **“A peaceful habitation, a tabernacle that will not be taken down, not one of its stakes will ever be removed, nor any of its cords be broken.” (Is. 33: 20)**. Namely it will be steadfast, not to be destroyed even by death, remaining eternally.

c. **“A place of broad rivers and streams” (Is. 33: 21)**; which makes it fruitful by Spirit.

d. It will be unapproachable or attackable, as through its rivers and streams **“no galley with oars will sail, nor majestic ships will pass by.” (Is. 33: 21)**

e. The Lord Christ Himself will be **“our Judge, our Lawgiver, our King and our Savior.” (Is. 33: 22)** He presented the law of the gospel, reigned on the cross, and saved us; and He still intercedes for us, through His precious blood.

f. Its enemy will be like a broken ship that cannot strengthen its mast, nor spread its sail (Is. 33: 23).

g. They will so strongly defeat the enemy, that even **“the lame will take prey.” (Is. 33: 23)**

h. No one living in Zion will say, ***“I am sick.”*** **(Is. 33: 24)**

i. ***“The people who dwell in it will be forgiven their iniquity.”*** **(Is. 33: 24)**

This is a portrayal of the soul that unites with the Lord Christ. It turns into Zion, the joyful city of God, filled with happiness and peace, steadfast in the Lord, surrounded by the Holy Spirit of God, to turn it into a fruitful paradise, that the devil would not be capable of defeating nor destroy. The Lord Christ proclaims in it His kingdom, being its King, Judge, Law-giver, and Savior. It will conquer the devil and destroy him. No spiritual ailment can affect; and lastly, it would enjoy the forgiveness of iniquities through a permanent repentance,

CHAPTER 34

CONDEMNATION OF ENEMIES OPPONENTS OF THE TRUTH

The two chapters 34 and 35 represent one prophecy.

The first Chapter presents a negative side, as God calls for all nations to gather together to witness a collective condemnation for the opponents of the Truth, and the oppressive to the people of God, represented particularly by Edom. The Edomites became happy for what befell the people of God on the hands of Assyria. Besides carrying out a wave of robberies, they captured whoever escaped to sell to the enemy, and lastly brought their sheep to graze in the cities and fields of Judah, that became desolate. Thus they became worthy of the wrath of God.

As for the next chapter, it includes a positive side, concerning setting the people, and restoring them to the mercy of God.

Chapter 34 reveals the divine wrath that would befall the enemy of the true Church; and accordingly the blessings that would befall the Church itself.

- 1. A collective call 1-4.**
- 2. Desolation of Edom 5-15.**
- 3. A confirmation that all these prophecies will be realized
16-17.**

1. A COLLECTIVE CALL

The prophet presents a collective call to all nations of the world to listen; to behold, and to pay attention, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. He proclaims God's condemnation on the nations that are consistent on committing evil, hoping that they would return to keeping God's commandments, after having, for so long stretched His ropes of patience.

The prophet gets back to confirm that this battle is not meant for humans, but is between God and His angels on the one side, and the devil and his angels on the other; saying, "***All the host of heaven shall be dissolved.***" (Is. 34: 4) "*The spiritual hosts of wickedness*" (Ephesians 6: 12; Revelation 12: 7, 9; 20: 1 - 8)

What does he mean by saying, "***All the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heaven shall be rolled up like a scroll; all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree***" (Is. 34: 4)?

- a. Certain millennium's Exegetes see in that a reference to an abolishment of the old

heaven, in order that, in the millennium, a new heaven and a new earth would be established¹.

b. **St. Augustine** believes that *the “sky, rolled up like a scroll,”* is the Holy Scripture, saying, [The two Testaments are called ‘heavens.’ I apprehend and understand the Holy Scripture, written by Your ministers, through the work of the Holy Spirit².] It is as though, one of God’s chastisements to the wicked, persistent on their evil, is their deprivation of the ability to enjoy the “*starry host of heaven,*” that is the power of the Holy Bible. It becomes for them a closed book, whose mysteries they would not be able to apprehend in their lives, or would be to them, as leaves falling “*from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree*”

As far as the children of God, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit would open up their minds, hearts, and all their energies, to apprehend the power of the word, working in their depths, as well as in their behavior.

Origen says, [The Holy Scriptures are written through the Holy Spirit of God. They have meanings, that do not appear at first glance, meanings that are not apprehended by many; as these written (words), are actually forms of certain mysteries and theologies. That is why, there is a common view in the Church, that the whole issue is truly spiritual; and that the spiritual meaning included in the Law, is not apprehended by all, except by those who are granted the grace of the Holy Spirit, as far as wisdom and prudence are concerned³.]

c. We can say that earth and heaven are symbols of man’s body and soul; the wicked lose holiness and safety of their bodies and souls; their bodies becoming like mighty mountains, yet, “*soaked with blood*” (**Is. 34: 3**); having an outer appearance of strength, and probably also, of beauty and splendor, while actually, they are like “*dead bodies that send up a stench;*” their souls become like heavens that lost all its energies (hosts), that are closed like a sealed book, having the appearance of courage, and probably of strong personality, but if one gets in close contact with them, he would find them, souls broken down by despair, and corrupted by inner sadness, beside by a feeling of isolation and deprivation.

That is an image of the wicked, having an outer appearance of strength, yet carrying all weaknesses in his depths; and as expressed by the Psalmist: “*Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*” (Psalm 37: 1, 2)

2. DESOLATION OF EDOM

The custom at that time was to cover swords with fat, so that they do not need to be cleaned after every time they are used. Fat would keep blood from sticking to them. As to the

¹ Cf. *Ironside: The Prophet Isaiah, ch 34.*

² *On Ps. 8.*

³ *De Principiis, Pref. 8.*

symbolic sword of the Lord, it would be covered with heavenly wrath, ***“My sword shall be bathed in heaven.” (Is. 34: 5)***

God’s wrath upon Edom was like the knife of a priest slaying a helpless sacrifice, ***“For the Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah (the capital) and a great slaughter in the land of Edom” (Is. 34: 6)***; not sacrifices for reconciliation, but divinely cursed burnt offerings for judgment (Is. 34: 5).

That sword went through all: the wild oxen (fierce warriors) as well as bull calves and great bulls (the commons); it is a collective judgment, as all have taken part in evil-doing.

“Their land will be soaked with blood, and their dust will be saturated with fatness.” (Is. 34: 7) As the name ‘Edom’ means both ‘dust’ and ‘blood,’ so their shed blood would mix with dust. They lived like dust, loving the earthly things, so they perished in their blood. God does all that for the sake of His Zion, His beloved people, hated by Edom. He finally confirms the utter desolation of Edom (Is. 34: 9-15):

“Its streams will be turned into pitch and its dust into brimstone; its land shall become burning pitch! It shall not be quenched night and day; its smoke shall ascend forever, from generation to generation it shall lie waste.” (Is. 34: 9, 10)

Its furnace will need no fuel from outside, as its streams will turn into pitch, and its dust into burning sulfur. Its land becomes a consuming fire that will not be quenched night and day. Its dark smoke will rise forever with terrible stench. Its desolation will continue from generation to generation. It will turn, from a place for humans into a dwelling place for beasts and birds of prey (Is. 34: 10, 11, 13, 14).

Instead of construction, God ***“shall stretch out over it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness.” (Is. 34: 11)***

Leaders will be lost, neither elite nor rulers.

In place of fruits, it will produce thorns; ***“Thorns shall come up in its palaces, nettles and brambles in its fortresses” (Is. 34: 13)***, a sign of desolation and lack of use.

“There the arrow snake shall make her nest and lay eggs, and hatch and gather them under her shadow.” (Is. 34: 15) The arrow snake is one of the most vicious kinds of snakes, despite its small size. In other versions, as this description applies more to a bird than to a snake, some scholars see in it a poetic reference to the dwelling of vicious evil spirits in souls, opponent to God there also the hawks be gather (Is. 34: 15), these are terrifying vultures.

Edom therefore, refers to the soul that denies faith and opposes Truth; to fall under divine wrath, and to turn into a furnace for itself, with nobody to quench its inner fire, or to give rest or comfort; to become desolate, thus loses its sensibility. Becomes a dwelling place for unclean thoughts and deviated emotions; to lose its reason; to turn into a playground for demons; and to make its life dry and fruitless like thorns. Loses its beauty and safety, also turns to permanent

darkness without day or light (Is. 34: 13)

3. A CONFIRMATION THAT ALL THESE PROPHECIES WILL BE REALIZED

“Search from the book of the Lord, and read: Not one of these shall fail.” (Is. 34: 16)

Here, he does not mean the book of life, or that of judgment (Ezekiel 32; Psalm 56: 8; 69: 28; Daniel 7: 10; Malachi 3: 16; Revelation 3: 5; 20: 12; 21: 27), but he means the prophecies he proclaimed concerning the desolation of Edom¹.

Although it is very rare, for the prophet to issue an order, yet here he does, saying, ***“Search... and read,”*** as all that, at that time, seemed unreasonable and impossible to happen. Yet that prophecy has been partly realized through the desolation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and is still being realized every day, as far as the opponents of Truth are concerned; until it would be completely consummated on the ultimate advent of the Lord, when the devil and his hosts will perish.

¹ *Bultema, ch 34*

CHAPTER 35

BLESSINGS OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

This chapter is considered a consummation of the last one. If God condemns the opposing nations, He is doing that for the sake of the edification, growth, and glorification of His people. It was realized through the coming of the Messiah, Savior of the world, who, by His cross, destroyed the forces of darkness, and opened the gates of His divine blessings, before those who return to Him, whatever their weakness is.

- 1. Turning wilderness into paradise** **1-4.**
- 2. Fulfilling the needs of believers** **5-9.**
- 3. A kingdom of joy and rejoicing** **10.**

1. TURNING WILDERNESS INTO PARADISE

Some scholars see what came here as concerning the situation of the children of Israel after their return from the Babylonian captivity. Yet, many others, including the majority of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant scholars, see in it, a description of the situation of the Church of the New Testament, enjoying the Lord Christ as its Head, pouring on it His glory and splendor. Followers of the Millennium kingdom, on the other hand, consider this chapter as a prophecy of it that remains to be realized¹.

A true believer who experiences the new life in Christ Jesus can experience the glory of the Church, proclaimed in his inner life, as:

a. The wilderness and wasteland turn into fruitful paradise, through God's entrance, and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, in the heart, the inner barrenness is uprooted, and God's fruitful paradise, that pleases the Lord, will be planted (Is. 35: 1, 2).

❖ It is obvious that he is not talking here of places outside the soul or senses, but is proclaiming good news concerning the thirsty soul. And as the Psalmist David says, "*My soul longs for you like a thirsty land.*" (Psalm 143: 6) "*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*" (Psalm 42: 2)²

St. Gregory of Nyssa

b. The most important feature of the Church of the New Testament is probably the 'Joy of the Lord,' leading an inner joyful life, because of the work of God in it. This trend is obvious in

¹ *Bultema, p. 318.*

² *On the Baptism of Christ.*

all the book of Isaiah, namely, that the messianic age is a joyful one; while there is neither peace nor joy for the wicked who reject the salvation work of God.

“The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice.” (Is. 35: 1, 2)

❖ Whoever looks within himself to God, and his soul mingled with His light, will have his heart filled with joy¹.

St. John Saba

❖ As it is with the trees, that would not grow, if they are not watered, the soul if it does not receive the heavenly joy it cannot grow nor ascend to the high; while that soul that received the heavenly Spirit and joy, is able to do that; having the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, revealed to it while still in the flesh, found favor before God in every respect, and have been granted all its requests.

❖ A soul always grows by that joy; and through it, ascends to heaven, as it has, like the body, its own spiritual food.

St. Anthony the Great²

c. God’s glory and splendor in the heart are realized, as a sort of a pledge of the eternal heavenly glory.

“The glory of Lebanon will be given to it... They will see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God.” (Is. 35: 2)

St. Macarius the Great speaks of this hidden glory, that fills the life of the believer, to be proclaimed in the great day of the Lord, saying, [Through a renewal of the mind (Romans 12: 2), having sound thoughts, and heavenly love of the Lord (Ephesians 3: 19) the new creation of Christians is designated (2 Corinthians 5: 17)... Each one, as much as he is counted worthy of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, through faith and strife, will have his body glorified on that day; as all what the soul has stored inside it, in this present life, will then be proclaimed, and revealed in the body on that day³.]

The apostle says, *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* (2 Corinthians 3: 17 - 18)

d. Man becomes a support for his weak brothers: ***“Strengthen the weak hands, and make***

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981م، ص131.

² المرجع السابق، ص131.

³ Sermon 5.

firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear!; Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come to save you.'"(Is. 35: 3, 4)

If life with God represents a hidden personal relationship, between God and a believer, yet it is not an isolated individual relationship, but is rather through a life of fellowship between God and His one Church.

Every member supports his brother in the Lord, for all to be strengthened as one bride. Every support you give to your brother is actually a support for yourself personally, as he represents your hands and knees.

❖ There is nothing that makes men quickly defeated and collapsed in temptations, like isolation. If you scatter forces in a war, the enemy will have no problem to captivate them individually¹.

St. John Chrysostom

2. FULFILLING THE NEEDS OF BELIEVERS

a. Saying, "*He will come to save you, then...*" (Is. 35: 4, 5) that is when the Lord and Savior Christ comes amazing signs and miracles will be realized: "*The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the shall lame leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing; For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.*" (Is. 35: 5, 6)

Those who believe in the millennium kingdom try to refer that to it, although the Lord Christ Himself, used that same text, when He responded to the two disciples of John the Baptist who came to Him, confirming that He is the coming Messiah (Matthew 11: 4 . 6). **St. Augustine** comments on this, saying, [As though He is telling them: You have seen Me, and seen My works, therefore acknowledge Me! "*Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.*"]²

God, who created every thing well, came Himself to the world, in order to renew His creation; to repair what became corrupted; to give back to man his peace, health and joy; to open up his inner insight, to be able to behold the divine mysteries, and his ears to enjoy the divine voice, and to respond to His commandments; to grant the lame the ability to walk along the heavenly way; and the mute to utter inner praises. We enjoy all these deeds through the work of the Holy Spirit (the water and rivers), Who was sent by the Lord Christ, from the Father.

❖ The prophecy of Isaiah, is realized, not only in the physical sense, but also in the spirituals... Those who were lame before, started to leap like a deer, through the power of Christ. They were compared to the deer not by chance, but because he is a pure animal and the snakes can't

¹ In Heb. Hom. 30:2.

² Serm. on N.T. Lessons 16:3,4.

hurt him with their poison. Likewise the mute will be able to speak¹.

Origen

b. *"The parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water. In the habitation of jackals where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes" (Is. 35: 7)*

Meaning by this, that instead of draught, there will be plenty of water, the parched ground will turn into pools, and the thirsty land will become bubbling springs. Where the jackals once dwelt, namely in the wilderness, grass and reeds will grow, as well as papyrus which abounds only where water is plenty.

Prophets often refer to the messianic age as one of water (Is. 41: 17 - 20; 43: 18 - 20; 44: 3, 4; Ezekiel 47: 1 - 12). The Psalmist says, *"There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High dwells. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."* (Psalm 46: 4, 5)

❖ What could be that river, but the flood of the Holy Spirit, of which the Lord said: *"If one thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* (John 7: 37, 38)

These streams flowed from within the bosoms of Paul, Peter, John, and the rest of the apostles, as well as of the believing evangelists. And as all these streams flowed from one river, that is why *"they make glad the city of God."*

It is obvious that these streams refer to the Holy Spirit, by which every pious soul that believes in Christ is sanctified, to become a citizen in the city of God².

St. Augustine

"A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there." (Is. 35: 8, 9)

What is this *"Way,"* other than the Lord Christ Himself, who presents Himself to His believers as the secure Way, over which the unclean will never pass, but all who walk on it will be saints; even the "fool," will acquire prudence and wisdom, and shall not go astray. The devil (the voracious lion) will not be able to approach those walking on it.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, talks to us about our faith in the Lord Christ, as a shield against the devil, saying,

[Is there anything more terrifying than the devil? Yet, the only effective shield against him is faith, being an unseen shield against an unseen enemy, who aims an assortment of arrows

¹ On Matt. Book 11:18.

² On Ps. 46.

in the middle of the night, toward those who are not careful.

But, as he is an unseen enemy, we have in faith an effective weapon, as said by the apostle: *“Take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”* (Ephesians 6: 16)

As the devil aims a flaming dart of lowly lust, faith will bring to mind an image of the judgment, so that the mind will extinguish the flaming dart.^{1]}

3. A KINGDOM OF JOY AND REJOICING

All nations coming to Him would be anointed with the anointment of joy, to become a holy nation; Everlasting joy that come with would crown their heads. No sorrow or sighing would ever find a place in their hearts.

This is the anointment of the Church of the New Testament, being the heavenly icon, rejoicing in the Lord; that is why it is said:

“The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; with everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (Is. 35: 10)

- ❖ There is comfort, where there is no pain, sorrow or sighing, where there is no confusions, troubles, struggles, or fear; there would only be the fear of God filled with joy².
- ❖ We would rather be sad here, contemplating on our situation, than to get sad there, with condemnation... Let us enjoy the exalted, unimaginable blessings. In Christ Jesus our Lord (not to become troubled by sorrow)³.

St. John Chrysostom

¹ *Cat. Lect. 5:4.*

² *In Hebr. Hom.6:10.*

³ *Ibid 23:9.*

THE SECOND SECTION

THE HOLY ONE GRANTOR OF VICTORY ISAIAH 36-39

THE HOLY ONE GRANTOR OF VICTORY

In the previous chapters, the prophet revealed what every human and every nation have ended up to. Now he proclaims that the fallen man, destroyed by sin and threatened by death, can live as a conqueror and victorious by the Holy God, overcoming enemies and death, if he gains an inner conquest in his depths.

The prophet presents to us the dealings of God with king Hezekiah, as a living example of the enjoyment of the Holy God, Grantor of victory, together with an actual model of him who loses his conquest and victory over enemies when he disregards his fellowship with the Holy One.

The events included here (Is. 36 to 39) were mentioned in 2 Kings 18: 13 - 20; 19; and in 2 Chronicles 32. Some scholars tried to research: who quoted the other, the prophet Isaiah (or his author), or the author of the second book of Kings and the second book of Chronicles? But, as some other exegetes say that they believe in the ability of the Holy Spirit to inspire the same thing to several persons, with no one having to depend on the writings of another.

CHAPTER 36

SENNACHERIB AGITATES THE PEOPLE

Sennacherib, king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh, to agitate the people against Hezekiah, king of Judah, persuading them not to lean upon Pharaoh, and not to be deceived by the words of their king, who leans upon his God, but to make peace with him, to avoid the devastation of their land; and, willingly, to accept to be taken into captivity.

To apprehend that historical incident, we have to study 2 Chronicles 32, and 2 Kings 18: 13-20; 19.

- 1. Sennacherib captures the cities of Judah** 1.
- 2. Sennacherib sends his delegation to Jerusalem** 2-10.
- 3. Rabshakeh agitates the people** 11-21.
- 4. Palace administrators report to Hezekiah** 22.

1. SENNACHERIB CAPTURES THE CITIES OF JUDAH

“In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.” (Is. 36: 1)

The invasion by Sennacherib of Judah was mentioned in Isaiah 36, as well as in 2 Kings 18: 13 – 20. Comparing the two texts we notice the following:

a. In 2 Kings 18, we read that Hezekiah wrote to the king of Assyria, saying, *“I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay.”* The king of Assyria assessed Hezekiah king of Judah 300 talents of silver and thirty talents of gold, which he paid from the house of the Lord, and from the treasuries of the king’s house. Yet Sennacherib betrayed his word, and sent his army once more to invade Jerusalem. The recorded history of Assyria confirmed that, and Hezekiah, seen as a bird in a cage, unable to come out of Jerusalem, paid the tax imposed, and lost 200, 000 of his people to captivity.

Isaiah did not mention that issue of the tax, for he was not interested in the biography of Hezekiah, but in demonstrating how God dealt with him, to confirm the possibility of God’s salvation, when everything seem impossible.

b. Some scholars believe that Sennacherib invaded Judah twice: the first time in the year 701 B.C.; and a second time in 688 B.C., in the days of Tirhakah, the king of Cush and Egypt (Is. 37: 9).

c. It came in 2 Kings 18: 17 that Sennacherib sent with Rabshakeh two other officers, Tartan and Rabsaris, though Rabshakeh was the spokesman of the delegation.

Some believe that Rabshakeh was not a name of a person, but a rank equivalent to a chief Butler, whose duty is to taste the wine before giving to the king to drink, in order to protect him from probability of poisoning; that is beside other important responsibilities in the royal palace.

God allowed that affliction to occur in the days of Hezekiah, who achieved many reforms among the people, although several of the civil and religious leaders have cared for superficial, more than for real reforms, for appearances than for holy life. God intended to support Hezekiah, and to turn the affliction to glorification. From another side, God intended to reveal Hezekiah's weakness before himself; as he lost his composure, for his dependence on God was not perfect. Through experience he eventually admitted his weakness, and had his faith and trust in God increased.

2. SENNACHERIB SENDS HIS DELEGATION TO JERUSALEM

Sennacherib sent Rabshakeh from Lachish, a fortified city in the valleys of Judah (Joshua 15: 33, 39). The city seems to have been abandoned about 400 B.C., and this circumstance has rendered the identification of the site difficult. It was formerly fixed at *Umm Lakis*, from the similarity of the name and because it was in the region that the Biblical references to Lachish seem to indicate, but the mound called *Tell el-Hesi* is now generally accepted as the site¹, 16 miles to the northeast of Gaza, and 11 miles southwest of Gebrin. Sennacherib put it under siege, and from his camp he sent Rabshakeh to Jerusalem asking the king and men to surrender.

Rabshakeh, and with him a great army, stood at the aqueduct of the upper pool, on the road to Fuller's Field (Is. 36: 2), just outside, and very close to Jerusalem, where those on the wall of the city could easily hear whoever speaks in the Fuller's Field. Some believe it to be in the valley of Kidron, and that the aqueduct spoken of, was a tunnel that connected the Fountain of the Virgin with the pool of Siloam; while others yet believe that it was north of the city, as the north has been the natural side from which an invasion would take place.

With him came out Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, the palace administrator (Is. 22: 15 - 20), some sort of a Prime Minister, and Shebna the scribe who was over the house, and was responsible for recording for the king the important incidents as memorabilia, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder.

Rabshakeh ridiculed Hezekiah the king before his elite, calling Sennacherib, the great king of Assyria, while not giving any title to Hezekiah (Is. 36: 6). He ridiculed him because he leaned upon the Pharaoh of Egypt, saying, ***“You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it.” (Is. 36: 6)***

He was right in this, as depending upon human arm, is like leaning on a splintered reed of staff, unable to support him, and would pierce and wound his hand. He ridiculed him as well

¹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database.*

because he leaned upon God, his Lord, saying, *“Is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, ‘You shall worship before this altar.’ Thus says the king: ‘Do not Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you,’ nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord saying, ‘The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria... Has anyone of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria?’”* (Is. 36: 7, 15, 20)

At the same location where Ahaz, previously ridiculed the Lord, rejected dealing with Him, and leaned upon human hand (Is. 7), Rabshakeh ridiculed the Lord; as though the children of Judah were destined to drink from the same cup, previously presented to them by their king! At the same location, where Isaiah came to Ahaz to persuade him to ask for a sign, to confirm the Lord’s ability for salvation, which he refused to do, Rabshakeh came to ridicule Judah, their king and their Lord!

Hezekiah, likewise, depended upon human pacts with Pharaoh, for which the Lord rebuked him on the tongue of a heathen, who called these pacts, *“only empty words”* (Is. 36:5), with no strength or activity. And now he challenges him to give him 2000 horses, if he can put riders on them! As though he is saying to him, ‘Why do you have to lean upon Egyptian horses and horsemen? We can provide you with horses, if you provide riders for them!’

3. RABSHAKEH AGITATES THE PEOPLE

Rabshakeh, having used a psychological sort of war, in order to agitate the people against their king and his men, to lead them into despair, and to destroy their faith in the Lord their Savior. Hezekiah’s men, pleaded with Rabshakeh for speaking to them in Aramaic-Syrian the language spoken by the inhabitants of the north and east regions of Palestine, and known to the Assyrians, who speak a related language, and which was not understood by the common Jewish people. But Rabshakeh insisted on speaking in Hebrew, in order to agitate the people and to create a sort of dissension, which he hoped would lead to a civil war between the people and their leaders.

That is the way the devil works. He uses the language that agitates our weakness, and that leads to dissension and division.

Rabshakeh wanted to agitate the people by drawing their attention to the devastation they would face, instead of enjoying a good life in Assyria, to reveal that Hezekiah is deceiving them, and that their God would not deliver them. He used the same way used by the devil all along the ages; and used today by the followers of ‘The church of the devil,’ who claim that they worship him, because he responds to their requests, which are not responded to by God.

The main work of the devil is to terrorize man, by letting him doubt the strength of faith, in order to isolate him from God, his King and Savior, so as to be able to control him. That is why the prophet David cries out: *“Many are they who say of Me, ‘There is no help for him in*

God.” (Psalm 3: 2) “All those who see Me laugh Me to scorn. They shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, ‘He trusted in the Lord, Let Him rescue Him. Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him.” (Psalm 22: 7, 8) “For my enemies speak against me; those who lie in wait for My life take counsel together. Saying, ‘God has forsaken him, pursue him and seize him, for there is none to deliver him.’” (Psalm 71: 10, 11)

That is how the devil works. He ridicules the believers, and insults them, destroying their souls, to let them lose their hope in the Lord their God, then pursues them and takes them with him down to the abyss. He even tried to follow the same procedure of war, with Jesus, the Representative and Savior of humanity, when he let it be said to him: “*He saved others, Himself He cannot save! If He’s the King of Israel! Let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.*” (Matthew 27: 42)

“But the people held their peace and answered him not a word, for the king’s commanded, ‘Do not answer him.’” (2 Kings 18: 36; Is 36:21). It was expected that they might rebel against their king, but they remained silent, a sign of obedience and trust, waiting for his orders and instruction. They obeyed the king who instructed them to refrain from responding to the offender, or to enter with him into a debate, for fear that they would fall into weakness, the way Eve did through her debate with the ancient serpent. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [She (Eve) should have kept silent; she should have refrained from debating with the serpent; yet she foolishly revealed the instructions of the Lord, thus giving the devil a great chance... See, the extent of evil we do, when we deliver ourselves in the hands of our enemies and those conspiring against us¹.] **St. Augustine** says, [The devil, incapable to offer anything practical, he offered promises in mere words. That is how deceivers are².] **St. Augustine** also says, [The Lord is our leader, while the devil is our destroyer; the leader provide his commandment, while the destroyer his deceit! Shall we listen to the commandment or to the deceit?³]

4. PALACE ADMINISTRATORS REPORT TO HEZEKIAH

The men came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and sadly and bitterly told him what Rabshakeh had said (Is. 36: 22).

When we feel bitterness let us not tear our clothes, but our hearts with repentance, resorting to the Lord Christ, the King, who is the only One capable of granting us the sound counsel, working in us with His Holy Spirit.

¹ للمؤلف: هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، مقال 3.

² In 2 Tim. Hom. 8.

³ On Ps. 71.

CHAPTER 37

HEZEKIAH RESORTS TO THE LORD

Having listened to the ridicules of Sennacherib, Hezekiah found in the Lord his only refuge. He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord. He dispatched messengers to the prophet Isaiah, asking for his prayers, and for the glorification of the name of the Lord. God intervened in the battle with His mighty arm. The angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185, 000 men in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib, as well as his son Sherezer were killed, and Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.

- 1. Hezekiah resorts to the Lord and His prophet 1-4.**
- 2. Isaiah assures Hezekiah 5-7.**
- 3. The king of Assyria ridicules the Lord 8-13.**
- 4. Hezekiah's prayer 14-20.**
- 5. Isaiah, once more, assures Hezekiah 21-35.**
- 6. The Lord strikes the Assyrian army 36.**
- 7. Sennacherib and his son Sherezer were killed 37-38.**

1. HEZEKIAH RESORTS TO THE LORD AND HIS PROPHET

There is controversy around the evaluation of what Hezekiah did. Some see him as a pious man, who with his humiliation robbed the compassion of God, although later on, he fell in the sin of pride and perished. Others believe that what Hezekiah did, was not out of piety nor of faith, as after a while he gave up to Sennacherib the treasures of the temple (2 Kings 18: 14-16), and said to him, *'I have done wrong.'* Moreover, in his talk with Isaiah, he repeated the phrase *"the Lord your God"* (Is. 37: 4), instead of "our God" or "my God."

To go back to the king, we see him, on hearing the words of Rabshakeh, *"tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord"* (Is. 37: 1), a sign of his grief and humility before the Lord.

"He sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet." (Is. 37: 2) Everything have changed, after the civil and religious leaders were ridiculing Isaiah, as he walked naked and barefooted, warning them that Pharaoh and his men would not rescue them (Is. 21), now they are coming to him wearing sackcloth to proclaim in bitterness their need for his prayers and his counsel. They realized that *"The day is a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth."* (Is. 37: 3)

Who could help out, but the Lord through prayers! Pharaoh, with all his might, cannot

help a pregnant woman to give birth when her time comes. Prayer is the only way.

St. John Chrysostom says, [Nothing equals prayer! It makes the impossible possible, and the difficult easy. It is not possible for a man who prays, to fall easily into sin¹.] **Fr. Theophan the Recluse** says, [A prayer is the summary of everything: Faith; life according to faith; salvation etc.²] He also says, [A prayer is the breath of the Spirit³.] [It is the measure of the spiritual life⁴.] [The whole Church breathes through prayer⁵.]

Rabshakeh insolently ridiculed the living God; therefore, there is need for the intervention of that God to proclaim His glory and might. For the salvation of the remnant, honest to Him, the Psalmist says, “*O God, how long will the adversary reproach?*” (Psalm 74: 10)

2. ISAIAH PUTS HEZEKIAH’S HEART AT EASE

Isaiah ridiculed the king of Assyria and his men, counting his leaders as ‘servants’ of no understanding or ability; of whom, it is not fitting for Hezekiah to fear (Is. 37: 6). What Sennacherib did through his men would be done to him; as they tried to fill the ears of the people with words of blasphemy and threats of death, the ears of the king would get filled with a disturbing report (Is. 37: 7), and would fall by the sword in his own country. The words, “*I will send a spirit upon him*” (Is. 37: 7), mean that God would deliver him to the spirit of evil which he received by his own will, so that the evil he does would get back on him

3. THE KING OF ASSYRIA RIDICULES THE LORD

Rabshakeh returned to Sennacherib, to find that he left Lachish to fight against Libnah, a city located between Lachish and Makkedah (Joshua 10: 39; 12: 15), within Judah’s share, allotted to the children of Aaron (Joshua 21: 13). It was probably in Tal Bornat, two miles northwest of Beth Gebrin, assumed now to be Tal El-Safi or El-Safia.

As the king received a report that Tirhakah, the king of Cush and Egypt (Is. 37: 9) was marching out to fight against him, he sent to Hezekiah one more time, to threaten him, and to request that Jerusalem should be handed over to him, blaspheming God upon whom Hezekiah is depending.

Some ask why did Sennacherib repeat his threat? Probably because he was surrounded by opposing nations, and feared Tirhakah the strong king of Egypt and Cush, He wanted to take over Jerusalem with no bloodshed, to gain its support.

Despite the blasphemy that his message carried against God, yet it was shorter and less

¹ *De Anno Sermo 4; PG. 54:666.*

² *Cf. Tomas' Spidlik: The Spirituality of the Christian East, 1986, P.307. Nacertanye christianskago nraoucenija (Christian Moral Teaching) Moscow 1895, p. 122.*

³ *Ibid. 406.*

⁴ *Cf. Spidlik: Theophane la Recluse, p. 240.*

⁵ *Ibid 241.*

aggressive than the first, probably because he liked to win Hezekiah on his side, by showing that he harbors no personal animosity against him; but the battle was rather, between the god of Sennacherib, the conqueror of all the gods of other nations, and the God of Hezekiah.

Our spiritual battle is actually between God and the devil, in which we are not, and cannot be a part. If we hide in God, we gain victory in and by Him, whatever the blasphemy of the enemy. When the prophet David heard the mighty Goliath reproaching his people, he said: “*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?*” (1 Samuel 17: 26) “*You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel.*” (1 Samuel 17: 45)

4. HEZEKIAH’S PRAYER

When Hezekiah read the message of Sennacherib, he went up to the temple of the Lord, spread it out before the Lord, and prayed to Him (Is. 37: 14, 15).

As Sennacherib pretended to harbor no animosity toward Hezekiah, and assumed that the battle is one between gods, Hezekiah went up to his God to place the matter before Him in His holy sanctuary. Perhaps one of Hezekiah’s strongest points was that he was a man of prayer. In five occasions we see him gaining power through praying. In his prayer we notice:

a. Opening his heart with humility. He did not justify himself in anything, but hid himself completely, putting the matter in God’s hands.

b. He calls God “*the Lord of hosts,*” being the capable leader of the battle, and of hosts capable of conquest and victory.

St. Jerome tells us about an Egyptian monk by the name of Abba Aban, [A worker in the fields beside the river asked him to rid them of a Behemoth - a kind of Egyptian crocodile - that was causing great harm to them. All the monk did was addressing it in a gentle voice: “I plead to you in the name of Jesus Christ to depart from here.” The beast complied, as though chased by an angel, and completely departed from that region¹.]

Through our Lord Jesus Christ we enjoy sure victory. **Origen** was asked, ‘If the devil was actually destroyed together with his hosts, how come that we believe that he still have authority against the servants of God?’ He responded saying, that the fierce influence of the devil is only effective on the wicked, but he has no more authority over those who are in Christ².

c. He calls God “*enthroned between the Cherubim,*” as he is in no need of a worldly throne, His is a heavenly one. Thus in His work He seeks nothing for His own sake, but what is

¹ *The histories of the Monks who lived in the Desert of Egypt.*

للمؤلف: قاموس آباء الكنيسة وقديسيها، العهد الجديد 1، 1986، ص40.

² *In Librum Jesu Neve, hom. 8:4.*

for the edification of His people and His believers.

d. He calls God, as *“Alone is God over all the kingdoms of the earth,”* and not the God of Israel, having in His hands all nations of the world, controlling them by His holy will.

e. Indeed, Sennacherib had conquered all the neighboring nations, thrown their gods into fire and destroyed them; but what could he do with the Almighty Creator?

f. He presented a wonderful end for his prayer: *“Now, O Lord our God, save us from his hands, that all kingdom of earth may know that you are the Lord, You alone.”* (Is. 37: 20) It is as though, the conquest You grant us, is a testimony to the world, of the truth of our belief in You, and of the fact that You alone, and none else is God.

5. ISAIAH, ONCE MORE, ASSURES HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah prayed to God, and the response came promptly through the prophet Isaiah along the following lines:

a. If Sennacherib has blasphemed against God and ridiculed Him, God addressed Sennacherib, saying, *“The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you, laughed you to scorn. The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head behind your back.”* (Is. 37: 22) As though He is saying to him: If you have come against Me as a wild beast, I know how to check you and mock you through the virgin daughter of Zion, daughter of Jerusalem. You are coming to Me with your mighty army, and I will destroy you by a virgin maiden who will mock you. You are boasting your many chariots, that you have ascended the heights of the mountains of Lebanon, cut down its tallest cedars, the choicest of its pines, and went into depths of Carmel. But you do not apprehend how mighty I am. I have dug wells with my hands, and with the soles of My feet I have dried up all the streams of Egypt; I have the keys of nature in My hand. Have you heard what I did to Pharaoh in the days of the prophet Moses? (Is. 37: 24-26) Recall what I did to the nations, when I granted the Promised Land to My people! Learn from history through actual events!

God proclaims to Sennacherib that He is the Almighty who is aware of all mysteries. He is in no need of messages of blasphemy from him: *“I know your dwelling place, your going out and your coming in, and your rage against Me. Because your rage against Me and your tumult have come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came.”* (Is. 37: 28, 29)

In other words, God ridiculed him along several lines: He can mock him through a virgin daughter that despises him. He can agitate the forces of nature against him. He can control his movements and lead him to where he does not want to go! In other words, God humiliates the devil through His Church, His virgin daughter, uses nature to destroy all possibilities and plans of

the devil.

In the biography of **St. Milania** we are told how the devil, having realized that all his plots and plans against her have failed, confessed his defeat, surrendered, and realized that he was unable of subduing her. **Origen** believes that it is more fitting for us to put the blame upon ourselves when we err, and should not consider the devil responsible, as do the simple common people¹. We were granted, through Christ Jesus, the power to destroy the enemy if we chose to.

b. God gave to Hezekiah the following glorified sign, in order to spare him the terror, caused by the Sennacherib's invasion (Is. 37: 30-32). If the enemy has confiscated all crops, and even left no seeds to sow, which would definitely lead to famine, that year and the one to follow, plants would grow with no need of sowing seeds. ***"You shall eat this year such as grows of itself, and the second year what springs from the same. Also in the third year sow and reap. Plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them"*** (Is. 37: 30)

It is as though, when His people are helpless and with no possibilities God works wonders for them, until the time comes and they retain their normal conditions, He would again work in them, through the natural laws of nature.

That sign was a symbol for the remnants of Judah, whose deliverance was a gift of God, despite the oppression and fierceness of the enemy, saying, ***"And the remnant who escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward."*** (Is. 37: 31)

It is as though, after being utterly uprooted by the enemy, God will replant them and give them fruit, as He did with their crops in the first and second years of Sennacherib's invasion, ***"The zeal of the Almighty will accomplish this,"*** (Is. 37: 32) namely, that this delivery is not to be realized for the sake of human worthiness, but because of God's love and zeal for His people, being the heavenly Groom, jealous for His bride, to be holy for Him: ***"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I am zealous for Jerusalem, And for Zion with great zeal.'" (Zechariah 1: 14) "The Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God."*** (Exodus 34: 14)

Through that sign God proclaims the following blessings for His people:

1. Delivery from judgment. No famine will come to them, but they will enjoy plenty of fruits (Is. 37: 30).

2. ***"Out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant; and those who escape from Mount Zion..."*** (Is. 37: 32); a reference to the renewal of human nature, and God's care for His Church.

3. ***"...will bear fruit upward"*** (Is. 37: 31); namely, they will bear an exalted heavenly nature.

¹ De Principiis 3:21.

4. Preaching will spread from Jerusalem (Is. 37: 32).

5. The source of this work of salvation is the fire of God's love and zeal (Is. 37: 32).

c. God confirmed that Sennacherib ***“shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return.”*** (Is. 37: 33-35) Thus, God - in His love for His children - uses every possible way to take away their worries, confirming to them His protection, His care, and His love for them.

d. God's protection of His people is not for the sake of their righteousness, but His zeal for His glory, and His covenants with His beloved children like David. It is not for the sake of Judah, or in response to the impressive prayers of Hezekiah, that God intervened, but as He said: ***“I will defend this city and save it, for My sake and for My servant David's sake.”*** (Is. 37: 35) David died, yet his life is still continuous through his raised prayers, for the sake of which God defends Jerusalem.

7. STRIKING THE ASSYRIAN ARMY

“The angel of the Lord went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses - all dead.” (Is. 37: 36)

Most probably ***“the Angel of the Lord”*** refers to the Word of God before incarnation. That was realized on the same eve following the conversation of the prophet Isaiah with Hezekiah (2 Kings 19: 35).

Sennacherib was defeated this time, although he had overcome and humiliated Hezekiah before. In a document discovered in the ruins of Nineveh¹ there were words said by Sennacherib, that he attacked Hezekiah, took over 46 castles and small cities, captivated a multitude of men and women, confiscated a great herds of cattle; shut Hezekiah in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage; built walls around his cities, and put enormous taxes on him etc.

8. SENNACHERIB AND HIS SON SHEREZER WERE KILLED

Sennacherib and his son Sherezer were killed, while worshipping in the temple of their god Nisroch, whom they believed to be the source of their conquests over all the nations and their gods, and to be capable of protecting them.

¹ Bultema, p. 344/5.

CHAPTER 38

HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS AND RECOVERY

After telling us about the delivery of Jerusalem from the siege of Sennacherib the prophet Isaiah presents us with a narrative of the sickness of Hezekiah to the point of death, and his recovery. By that he probably intended to confirm that God cares, not only for the congregation as a whole (Judah), but also for every single member of it (Hezekiah). He cares for His holy Church, being His body, and, at the same time does not disregard its individual members.

God does not forsake His believers. He supported king Hezekiah when he took refuge in Him, in His holy temple, and through His prophet Isaiah, and did not lean on a human arm and temporary plans. And now, as Hezekiah got ill to the point of death and was unable to go to the holy temple to pray, he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord; weeping bitterly, he counted his illness as a defeat for the people, and a sign that the Lord has forsaken them. Listening to his yearning to consummate his mission, God added 15 years to his life.

1. *'Put your house in order, because you are going to die'* 1-8.

2. A psalm of thanksgiving 9-20.

3. Treating Hezekiah with a poultice of figs 12-22.

1. PUT YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER, BECAUSE YOU ARE GOING TO DIE

"In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death." (Is. 38: 1) From this phrase and verse 6 it is obvious that Hezekiah's illness happened during the invasion of Sennacherib, probably a result of an epidemic caused by the siege, or because of a physical and psychological collapse resulting from the difficult situation. Isaiah then came to deprive him of any remaining hope of recovery, saying to him: *"Set your house in order, for you shall die."* (Is. 38: 1)

That news of his death has probably been a shock to him for one of the following reasons:

a. As was the case with the apostle Paul he was eager to depart from this world, yet he felt a commitment toward his ministry to others.

b. As was the case with men of the Old Testament, he feared death, as it was connected in their minds with sin and God's wrath upon human kind.

c. He probably was hoping for witnessing, in his days, the coming of the Messiah, the second Adam, as is obvious in his psalm (Is. 38: 11).

d. Or most probably his grief was because he had not begotten yet his son Manasseh (2 Kings 21: 1), whom he hoped to succeed him on the throne. This issue confused him, as how would then the divine promise to the house of David to stay forever be realized. Here Hezekiah's

weakness is a contrast to Abraham's strength who fearlessly presented his son Isaac a burnt offering to the Lord, having complete confidence that God's promise would surely be realized, even by raising him from the dead. Later on Hezekiah got Manasseh, lover of idol worship, who brought God's wrath upon Judah (2 Kings 23: 26).

Hezekiah was a man of prayer. He did not lose his hope in the Lord, but knew how to pray and strive. He turned his face to the wall, probably toward the direction of the temple, as it was the custom of the Jews, to pray to God, saying, ***“Remember, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in your sight.”*** (Is. 38: 3)

He looked back at his life as a trip in which he walked before the Lord (Genesis 5: 24; 1 Kings 9: 4), if not with complete perfection, yet with wholehearted devotion, aiming to perfection (Matthew 5: 45).

“Hezekiah wept bitterly.” (Is. 38: 3) God instructed Isaiah to go to the king to say, ***“Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: ‘I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.’”*** (Is. 38: 5)

It was a very quick response (2 Kings 20: 4). God probably talked to Isaiah mouth-to-mouth before he departed the royal palace, while he was busy giving spiritual advices to the palace administrators, to prepare affairs that would follow the king's death.

When God listened to Hezekiah's prayer and saw his tears, He recalled His covenant with David his father, as God fulfills His covenants with Fathers to their children (Exodus 20: 5; Psalm 89: 28, 29). He granted him what he uttered by his tongue and heart: an extension of his years, and a protection for the capital of his kingdom, Jerusalem.

The Lord provided Hezekiah with a sign he requested (Is. 38: 22), in which He differed from his evil father who refused to ask for a sign from God (Is. 7: 10). That sign came to confirm the realization of the divine promise in the following way: The shadow, cast by the sun, goes back ten steps (Is. 38: 8) - that were, according to some leading to a terrace or to an upper room in the palace; while others believe it to be an eclipse of the sun, that actually happened on the eleventh of January 689 B.C.¹ The sun, the true measure of time, had been used by God who controls time, events, and history, as a sign in the days of Joshua (Joshua 10: 12); of Hezekiah; on the day the Lord Jesus was crucified; and will happen just before His last advent, when the sun will darken. God, the Father of all lights, moves the sun, and directs it for our edification.

Some will probably ask: Did God change His mind by adding to Hezekiah's years?

St. Augustine² believes that God's decree was pre-known to Him before creation, kept in His divine will. His decision realized what He preplanned for Hezekiah.

¹ R.E. Clements, p. 291.

² The Literal meaning of Genesis 6:17.

We should not concern ourselves, with whether God changed His mind by adding fifteen years to Hezekiah's age, but rather with an apprehension of the power of prayer, that has granted a new life to a man, who was supposed to die through natural laws. Prayer, being an attachment to God, the grantor of life, is capable of everything, a conqueror of death - death of sin.

St. John Chrysostom¹ says, that we, through prayer for the sake of forgiveness of sins, consummate the will of God, and accordingly be sure that it will be received.

- ❖ Through prayer, offerings were well received. Prayer delivered Noah from the great flood; cured from barrenness; defeated armies; proclaimed mysteries; divided the sea; cut off the water of the Jordan; drove back the sun; froze the moon; destroyed the unclean, and brought down fire. Prayer shut off heaven; released people out of prison, and rescued from the sea. The power of prayer is as great as that of pure fasting.
- ❖ Hezekiah prayed; and his prayer defeated 185,000 men through an angel of the Lord (1 Kings 10: 15, 35).
- ❖ Daniel prayed, and his prayer sealed the mouths of lions.
- ❖ Our righteous Fathers carried the weapon of prayer, and have overcome sorrows.

Fr. Aphrahat²

- ❖ Blessed is he, who makes himself a friend to faith and prayer; he will live with one thought.
- ❖ Prayer rising in a man's heart will open up the doors of heaven.
- ❖ Prayer sets peace with God's wrath.

St. Ephram the Syrian³

- ❖ Prayer can press on the devil who presses on human kind. It can deliver from his hand and from all temptations of the world; that is why the Lord instructed us to: "*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.*" (Matthew 26: 41)

Fr. Martyrus⁴

3. A PSALM OF THANKSGIVING

a. We often remember the Lord in times of affliction and trouble but we forget Him in times of rejoice. But Hezekiah proved to be a man of prayer and tears in the midst of pains, as well as a man of praise in the midst of relief, to thank God for His goodness.

¹ *Expos. In Ps. 4:4; PG. 55:44 ff.*

² *Demonstration 4, on Prayer 1,8,9.*

³ *Cf. The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual life, p. 36.*

⁴ *Ibid p. 219.*

In this psalm he revealed that he was a man of prayer, a man of praise, a poet, a psalmist; filled with hope in the Lord, the Savior from death, and Grantor of joyful life.

b. Hezekiah did well by presenting this psalm, as an offering of thanksgiving to God, Grantor of life. Yet unfortunately he presented a praise of thanksgiving, but not a life of thanksgiving; as it is said: *"But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor shown him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem."* (2 Chronicles 32: 25)

It is fitting for us to praise the Lord, not just with our tongues, but with all the members of our bodies, with our feelings and senses, as well as with our behavior; so that our whole life turns into a multi-stringed guitar that plays a symphony of love for the Lord, our Creator and Savior.

c. It is obvious from Hezekiah's psalm that he suffered at first from a spirit of despair, saying, *"I said, 'In the prime of my life, I shall go to the gates of Sheol, I am deprived of the remainder of my years,'" (Is. 38: 10)* He was 39 years old, feeling that in the prime of his life, his happy days were cut off; was deprived of serving his God and his people, something he has put in his heart, hoping to consummate along the years of his life. It is as though he was saying the words of David: *"I said in my haste, 'I am cut off from before your eyes.'" (Psalm 31: 22)*

d. Hezekiah was probably looking forward to see the Lord Christ in his days, or was even hoping that the Lord would come incarnated from his seed. And now, he is about to die before all that. That is why he is crying out in despair: *"I said, 'I shall not see YAH, the Lord, in the land of the living. I shall observe man no more among the inhabitants of the world.'" (Is. 38: 11)*

What hope would be for us in this world or in that to come, if we do not enjoy seeing the Lord, here, through the eyes of the heart by faith, and there face-to-face?

❖ Blessed, triple-blessed, and even multi-blessed, are those who are worthy of beholding that glory. About this the prophet says, *"Let the wicked be cast away, and be deprived of beholding the glory of the Lord."* (Is. 36: 10 LXX) I pray to God that would not be for any of us! For, why are we living? Why are we breathing? What would it be for us, if we fail to behold our Lord? If those who cannot see the light of the sun count life as being worse than death, so what would it be for those who are deprived of beholding the light of the Lord?¹

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Before I show you our Lord, show us your man. Provide me with the proof that the eyes of your soul can see, and the ears of your heart can hear! As those, whose eyes are covered with a cloud of sin, cannot behold the Lord.

When you get rid of your corrupt nature, and be clothed with incorruption, you will be

¹ In Joan. Hom 12:3.

worthy of beholding God. God will give life to your body, and will let it be, imperishable, together with your soul. Then you will behold the only imperishable, if you believe in Him now¹.

St. Theophilus, of Antioch

e. He presents several parallels to describe his temporary life:

(1) **“Like a shepherd’s tent,” (Is 38: 12)** on the move all the time; that gives the impression of being a foreigner, with no place to settle down; the way our father Abraham has been, as he kept on moving all his life. We stay in this ever-moving tent until we cross over to an eternal home, not made by human hand. This same parallel was used by the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 5: 1), and also by the apostle Peter (2 Peter 1: 14).

(2) A fabric, **“I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom. From day until night You make an end of me.” (Is. 38: 12)** As such, God will weave our lives like a fabric cut off from the loom, weaved according to body size; not to last long, but to be cast off after a certain time. And as Eliphaz the Temanite says, **“Who are crushed before a moth? They are broken in pieces from morning till evening.” (Job: 4: 19, 20)**

(3) A victim of a lion that breaks all its bones in one night (Is. 38: 13).

(4) Like a swift or thrush crying weakly; its voice feeble because of sickness, or rather because of despair of recovery. **“I moaned like a dove. My eyes failed from looking upward.” (Is. 38: 14)**

f. Now, we find a sudden shift from feeling an **“anguish of his soul” (Is. 38: 15)** to an experience of a new life, as he says, **“O Lord, by these things men live. And in all these things is the life of my spirit. So you will restore me and make me live.” (Is. 38: 16)**

He moves from death to life, and from bitterness to sweetness, through the intervention of the Lord Christ, and the discovery of His divine work of salvation. He says, **“The Lord was ready to save me. Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the house of the Lord” (Is. 38: 19, 20)**

What did he find in his Savior?

(1) His life changed from a terrible trip and a bitter soul to a peaceful life, through which a believer does not fear even from the pit of corruption (Is. 38: 17).

(2) His soul rejoiced, not just for his recovery from sickness and adding to his life but because of the forgiveness of all his sins (Is. 38: 17).

¹ Ad Autolyeus 1:1-7; PG. 66:1024-36.

(3) He became eager to deliver this new life to the coming generations (Is. 38:19).

(4) The rest of his life turned into a continuous joyful psalm (Is. 38: 20), singing it as though in the house of the Lord. That is why **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says that feast (or joy) is “Christ,” the Source of our continuous joy. He also says, [Those who live in Christ are alone capable of glorifying and blessing God, and by that they ascend to the feast¹.]

The believer who lives in Christ will enjoy a continuous life of joy and thanksgiving, in the midst of both his passions and joys.

❖ There is no better time for man to harbor feelings of gratitude towards God like that when he is suffering temptations and troubles, and when he comes to comfort after passing through afflictions and strives².

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ A prayer is joy expressed in thanksgiving³.

St. Evagrius

❖ Through spiritual prayers and thanksgivings, we are raised from earth to highs⁴.

Fr. Martyrus

3. TREATING HEZEKIAH WITH A POULTICE OF FIGS

The prophet Isaiah asked for a poultice of figs (a cake of pressed figs) to be applied to the inflamed part of Hezekiah’s body, and he will recover. By that, God intended to proclaim, that although he is the divine Physician, yet He utilizes material medications that He created for our needs. From another aspect, to confirm that healing is a free gift granted by God.

A poultice of figs is like a bunch of grapes both refer to Church life. A fig bears an uncountable number of very tiny seeds; a single seed is both valueless and tasteless, unless gathered together with the rest of seeds under one cover, as though in a bond of sweetness of love and unity. That is the mystery of the sweetness of the Church, and that is the mystery of our healing. Despite whatever mystery personal relationship, that anyone of us may have with God, we gather together as a sweet fig in God’s mouth. That is why Hezekiah said, as a sign of his healing: **“I will go up to the temple of the Lord” (Is. 38: 22)** to gather together with the people of God through the Lord Himself.

¹ *Dwar. Ep. 7.*

² *Ibid 8.*

³ *Cf. The Syriac Fathers p.249.*

⁴ *Ibid p. 229.*

CHAPTER 39

HEZEKIAH DISPLAYS HIS TREASURES

This section of Isaiah's book sadly ended with the fall of Hezekiah in pride, displaying all his treasures and those of his Fathers to envoys from the king of Babylon, boastful of his richness and glory. That is why God ordered all of them to be carried off to Babylon.

As the star of Jerusalem started to shine, following the defeat of the king of Assyria, who used to terrify all nations; arrogance and haughtiness infiltrated into Hezekiah's heart, leading him to fall down into the abyss.

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Displaying the treasures | 1-2. |
| 2. A divine order for the treasures to be carried off | 3-7. |
| 3. Hezekiah admits his fault | 8. |

1. DISPLAYING THE TREASURES

Hezekiah's star shined as a result of the defeat of Sennacherib king of Assyria. Although Hezekiah raised a psalm of thanksgiving to God, especially for adding 15 years to his life, yet he did not practice that attitude in his life, but "*Hezekiah had very great riches and honor. And he made himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of desirable items; storehouses for the harvest of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of livestock, and folds for flocks. Moreover he provided cities for himself, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him very much property.*" (2 Chronicles 32: 27 - 29)

God let him enjoy that richness and glory for some time, "*to test him that He might know all that was in his heart*" (2 Chronicles 32: 31); then allowed Merodach-Baladan king of Babylon to send Hezekiah letters and a gift, having heard of his illness and recovery. It was more fitting for Hezekiah to glorify God, and to talk of His graces, rather than to display his own treasures. He fell to the sin of pride and proclamation of his vainglory, as did Samson, who collapsed when he revealed the mystery of his strength to the harlot.

Merodach, a title carried by numerous persons, is the name of the king of gods, mentioned with Bel (Jeremiah 50: 2); often used as part of the name of Babylonian kings. As for Baladan, it means (been given a son).

St. Hippolytus says, [Merodach the Chaldean who had knowledge of astrology studied the stars, discovered their mysteries, and sent a letter and gifts, as did the wise men from the east

with Christ¹.]

Hezekiah, motivated by the pride of his heart, and his love for vainglory displayed all what he had, to the envoys of Merodach-Baladan:

“There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.” (Is. 39: 2)

He did not appreciate the wise words of his father David: *“The royal daughter is all glorious within...”* (Psalm 45: 13)

- ❖ The vainglory has authority to blind the minds of those captivated by it, even to obvious facts, and leads them to argue, even well known ones.
- ❖ Whoever gets enslaved by the vainglory of this world cannot gain that glory from God. That is why they are rebuked by the Lord who says to them: *“How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?”* (cf. John 5: 44)

This curse is a kind, of hard to cure, strong alcoholism, that isolates the souls of its victims from the heavenlies, nails them to earth; keeps them from raising their eyes to the true light, and persuades them to wallow in the mud. Whomever this disease infects behaves according to his whims².

St. John Chrysostom

2. A DIVINE ORDER FOR THE TREASURES TO BE CARRIED OFF

God sent His prophet Isaiah to chastise Hezekiah; he asked him:

- ❖ What did those men say?
- ❖ Where did they come from?
- ❖ What did they see in your palace?

He did not answer the most important of these questions: What did those men say? He assumed that, because they came from a distant land they pose no danger to him (Is. 39:3). So the divine verdict was for the punishment to come through Babylon.

The verdict was severe, because pride is a very dangerous disease, a fellowship in the very nature of the devil. Hezekiah did not only lose the treasures he revealed, but also the freedom of his children, who were taken away as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (Is. 39: 7).

Origen believes that pride is the main sin of the devil³. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [The devil would not have fallen and become as such, if he was not infected with this disease, that cast

¹ *Fragments from Comm. On the prophet Isaiah, 1.*

² *In John hom. 3,5..*

³ *In Ezech. 9:2 PG. 13:734 CD.*

him out of God's trust, and brought him into the fiery pit. It is capable of destroying every goodness of the soul, even if he offers alms, prayer, fasting or anything else. There is no one more dumb than a proud man, even if he is blessed with richness or worldly wisdom, or is dwelling in a royal palace¹.

3. HEZEKIAH ADMITS HIS FAULT

“The word of the Lord you have spoken is good,” Hezekiah replied, ‘At least there will be peace and truth in my days.’(Is. 39: 8)

On the surface, the king uttered words of submission, although we do not know his real intentions; it is probably with no repentance and trust in God, the Forgiver of sins.

He admitted that he sinned, yet he did not repent, which is evident by the fact, that in place of crying out to God with tears, he felt at ease, because the punishment is to be put on hold, until after his death, in the days of his descendants. That was a kind of selfishness, as he only cared for his own well being, disregarding what would happen later to the people and to his children after him.

¹ In John hom 16:4.

THE THIRD SECTION

THE HOLY COMFORTER WITH SALVATION (Isaiah 10-66)

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1. Comfort, comfort my people | 40-44. |
| 2. Cyrus' attack on Babylon, and its desolation | 45-47. |
| 3. Talks of salvation | 48-59. |
| 4. The new city of the Lord | 60-66. |

THE HOLY SAVIOR

In the first two sections the prophet clarified the extent of corruption that humanity has reached, because of sin, and because of its deprivation of fellowship with the Holy God. In this section he proclaimed the need for that fellowship, in order to gain conquest within, over spiritual enemies, and even over death itself. Now, he is proclaiming what is far greater: The intervention of the Holy One, as a Savior grants man the fellowship of heavenly glories.

In this section, we find the following main broad lines:

1. **Christ the Savior, bearer of Passion**; or the suffering Slave who grants slaves the freedom of the children of God.
2. **The Messianic age**, as one of inner peace, and hidden glory, enjoyed by believers through fellowship with the Savior.
3. Demonstrating the greatest gift of Christ: **the Holy Spirit** who turns the wilderness of our hearts into a paradise, and our inner darkness into the light of Truth.

1
COMFORT, COMFORT
MY PEOPLE

ISAIAH 40-44

CHAPTER 40

COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE

The Book of Isaiah started by revealing the extent of corruption that the people of God, as well as the whole humanity, have reached. Now, in the present chapter, the Holy Spirit of God lifts us up to discover God's plan of salvation, and his ordinance for His people, in order to enjoy His divine work, and His exalted comforts. This chapter and the next one, aim to uproot the spirit of despair from the captives, and to implant that of hope in them.

1. **Comfort, comfort My people** 1-2.
2. **Preparing the way for the Lord** 3-8.
3. **The incomprehensible plan of God** 9-26.
4. **The situation of unbelievers** 27-31.

1. COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE

God used to refer the people to Him when He is pleased with them, calling them "**My people**;" But, when they get rebellious, He used sometimes to refer them to Moses (Exodus 32: 7), or just call them "*the people*" (Exodus 32: 9); or more frankly "*not my people*" (Hosea 2: 23). But here, as He opens before them and before all humanity the gate of salvation, He calls them "**My people**."

The prophet used to repeat a certain word twice, as what came here: "**Comfort, comfort**" (51: 9, 17; 5: 1), for He is talking about the Church of the New Testament, that comes from two categories: the Jews and the Gentiles, as it is the Church of love that unifies and binds. The figure 2 refers to love that turns the two into one.

It is the Church of love, that binds God to it, as a Groom to His bride; and that binds the members coming from all nations, as one body to one head. Through this love, He addresses it saying, "**Speak comfort to Jerusalem**" (Is. 40: 2); the literal translation being, "**Speak kindly to the heart of Jerusalem**," an expression that came several times in the Old Testament (Genesis 34: 3; 50: 21; Judges 19: 3; Ruth 2: 13; 2 Samuel 19: 7; 2 Chronicles 20: 22; Hosea 2: 14), addressed to someone beloved. The Church here, is the beloved bride of Christ, whom He addresses with the language of love, understood only by the heart - the same language He spoke with, more openly and deeply through the cross, to acquire humanity as His bride (Revelation 19: 7; 21: 2, 9).

It is an invitation presented by the Groom to His suffering bride, so that she would look forward, amid her sufferings, to the happy end, to help her endure the pain with hope and pleasure. The same way as her Groom did; who, "*for the joy that was set before Him, endured*

the cross” (Hebrew 12: 2), having seen our salvation and glorification in His bearing the cross. And as the apostle says, “*For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 1: 5)

What is the source of our comfort? God says, “*I am your comfort.*” The Father embraces us as His children, through our union with Christ, the Only-Begotten Son, who offers His life as atonement for our sins, as the Source of our comfort. “*Our consolation also abounds through Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 1: 5) Our Christ, who embraced us by His blood, offers us His “comforting” Holy Spirit, filling our hearts with Him, to set the kingdom of joy in our hearts. That is why He presents a talk addressed to the heart, saying, “***Speak comfort to Jerusalem and cry out to her; that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned. For she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.***” (Is. 40: 2)

Literally, the prophet looks at the captivity of the people, not as a political disaster, happening at random, or as a result of military weakness, but as a divine decision for the sake of chastisement. She received double chastisement. On one side she committed sins shameful for her, and on another side, she had not practiced God’s righteousness or done good. The divine commandment asks us to stop doing evil and to do good.

From the prophetic side, as she looks at her crucified Groom, she finds that He, completely paid her debt, not only for the sake of relieving her from it, but also to justify her by His blood, and to sanctify her, to enjoy the share in His glories. As though the entreaties of humanity, expressed by the prophet David, has been realized, in which he says, “*Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins.*” (Psalm 25: 18)

Now, the prophet watches over the procession of the people returning to Jerusalem, as a symbol of the procession of those redeemed through the blood of Jesus, the Lord of glory. St. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for that heavenly messianic procession.

2. PREPARING THE WAY FOR THE LORD

Perhaps the prophet Isaiah heard a heavenly voice calling the heavenly hosts to prepare for the coming-back procession from captivity to Jerusalem. Previously the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord departing from the city (Ezekiel 11: 22-25), and now the procession is coming back with the return of the captives; as though it is a royal procession, preceded by God Himself, the Redeemer of His children!

Yet, the greatest procession is the preparation of the way for the entrance of the Savior Messiah into the life of humanity, that was realized by St. John the Baptist, the angel of the Lord, through talking of penitence, and proclaiming the need of a Savior (Lamentations 1: 3; Matthew 3: 3; Luke 3: 4-6; John 1: 22).

St. John the Baptist has been the voice crying out in the wilderness, to prepare the way for the divine Word, proclaiming that every haughty soul will be made low (Is. 40: 4), every crooked

heart will become straight, and all obstacles will vanish, because the glory of the Lord will be proclaimed through the Savior Messiah, to be seen by all human kind: Jews and Gentiles. That is why the prophet says,

“A voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Is. 40: 3 - 5)

John was called a “voice,” while Christ was called “the Word.” There is a great difference between the two; as the Fathers say, the voice is what the ear hears, while the word is what is apprehended by the mind. So John came as a witness to Christ the divine Word:

- ❖ That can probably explain how Zechariah lost his voice, as John was conceived, and did not get it back until the “voice” that preceded the “Word” was born. The ear must hear the “voice,” so that the mind would apprehend the “Word” to which the voice refers. John refers to Christ, as the talk (the Word) is proclaimed through the voice¹.

Origen

- ❖ From our talk, you know that the “voice” comes first when the “Word” is heard. That is why John proclaims himself a “voice” as he is preceding the “Word.” Coming before the Lord, he was called a “voice,” and through his ministry, people received the “Word” of God. He cries out proclaiming, *“Make His paths straight.”* The Lord’s path to the heart would be straight, when the heart humbly receives His words of Truth. It would be straight, if we practice our lives in accordance with His commandments. That is why Jesus says, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him”* (John 14: 23)

Pope Gregory the (Great)

- ❖ Isaiah was aware of the preaching work of John the Baptist. So while he calls Christ, *“God and Lord”* (Is. 9), he refers to John as a messenger, a minister, and a lamp that emits light preceding the appearance of the true light. He is the ‘morning star’ that proclaims the rising of the sun from beyond the horizon. John was a voice and not a Word, preceding Christ, as the voice precedes the word².

St. Cyril the Great

What does this voice proclaim? It proclaims the gospel of the New Testament, which is

¹ *Comm. On John, book 2:26.*

² *On St. Luke, Serm. 6.*

the Lord's path that raises the humble souls to heavenly life, destroys the pride of the haughty, renews the creation that got crooked, to let it walk straight, and to remove the obstacles before it. **"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Is. 40: 5)**

- ❖ I wish you would walk along the royal path, and would not deviate right or left; to be led by the Spirit through the narrow door; then all your affairs would be set right on that day, in Christ Jesus our Lord¹.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

"A voice crying in the wilderness" (Is. 40: 3) of this barren life, that does not contain inside it 'the tree of life' as did the first paradise. He came to proclaim the coming of the Lord Christ, the Tree of life, to be planted in the wilderness of our nature, to turn it, through his dwelling, into a fruitful paradise. In the same meaning St. **Ambrose** says, [Before the Son of God sets members of the Church He started His work in His minister John. *"The word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness."* (Luke 3: 2) That was realized in the desolate wilderness, as *"More are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman"* (Is. 54: 1); to whom it was said: *"Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore"* (Is. 54: 1)... as it was not yet planted among the foreign nations, and has not yet come, He who said, *"I am like a green olive tree in the house of God"* (Psalm 52: 8); and the heavenly vinedresser has not yet given the branches fruits (John 15: 1). Thus the "voice" cried out, for the wilderness to produce fruit².]

- ❖ Let the Lord's path be prepared in our heart, as a man's heart is spacious, as though it is the world at large. Look at how great it is, not as flesh, but in the strength of the mind that gives it the possibility of embracing such a very great knowledge of the Truth.

Therefore, let the Lord's path be prepared in your heart, through a worthy life and good and perfect deeds. Let that path keep your life straight, so that the words of God get to you without hindrance³.

Origen

St. Augustine noticed that the prophet Isaiah used the word "flesh" in the phrase **"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Is. 40: 5)**. Yet he does not refer by that to the flesh without the soul, but he refers to man as a whole. The Holy Bible often uses the word "flesh," or "soul" to mean (man); as it is man in his wholeness, who beholds the glory of God [flesh alone without the soul beholds nothing⁴.]

¹ To whom who had invited Him, 8.

² Comm. On Luke 3:1-5. ترجمة مدام عايدة حنا بسطا

³ In Luke hom 21.

⁴ On the Soul and its origin.

When the evangelist says, “*The Word became flesh*” (John 1: 14) he does not mean that the Word of God became flesh without a human soul, as claimed by Apollinarius; something that made **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic**, wrote a book to prove that his friend Apollinarius was wrong in his interpretation, without mentioning his friend’s name.

The prophet Isaiah heard another heavenly voice confirming that every flesh (man) is like the grass of earth (Psalm 90: 5; 103: 15). But, “*The grass withers and the flowers fades, but the word of our God stands forever.*” (Is. 40: 8)

Whoever attaches himself to the dust of the earth, namely to love of the world, will become like withered grass. While who attaches himself to the Lord Christ “the Word of God” will rise with Him to live eternally in His glory. That is the path prepared by the Holy Bible for receiving the Savior. Our commitment to fellowship with Him, He, who turns us from being like withered grass of the earth, to fellowship with Him, and eternally abiding in His glory. And as **St. Augustine** says, [If someone yearns to real comfort and happiness, he has to lift up his hope above perishable things, to let it abide in the Lord’s Word, so that, being attached to it, it stops forever and he abides with it eternally.]

Origen comments on the words, “*Every flesh is like grass,*” by saying that the Lord Christ instructed the multitude to sit down on the grass (Matthew 14: 21), in order to feed them. Namely, that when man submits his flesh (**sitting on grass**), and places all worldly matters under the leadership of the soul, to walk in his wholeness according to the Holy Spirit, he will then, enjoy the blessings of the Lord Christ, and the true satisfaction. We will not be capable of encountering our Christ, nor receiving His divine gifts through the disciples (the Church), as long as we live according to the flesh. Therefore, let us submit the flesh to our souls by the Holy Spirit, and **sit on the grass**, so that when the flesh becomes an obedient servant, and works in harmony with the soul without resisting it, we enjoy the spirituals.

Here are some comments of the Fathers on the phrase, “*All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it.*” (Is. 40: 6, 7)

- ❖ As you see, whatever attaches to your soul, will do that eternally; if you attach to grass and grass flowers, you are binding yourself to the grass that withers and to the flowers that fade and fall, and God will perish it at the end¹.
- ❖ God, being our Father, knows our nature that we are nothing but dust, that if we flourish, it would only be for a certain time, therefore He sent us His Word, to stay with us forever, as a brother to the grass that withers in no time. Do not marvel that you shared in His eternity, as

¹ On Ps. 52.

He has already shared in your grass¹.

- ❖ That was how Moses did with the head of the golden calf (Exodus 32: 20), he burnt it. That head of the calf represents a great mystery, it represents the flesh of the wicked that feeds on grass and seeks the world things, for every flesh is but grass².

St. Augustine

- ❖ Why do you fear worldly matters, that pass like water in a river? This is the nature of contemporary things, either joyful or sad. Another prophet compares human flourishing to grass³.
- ❖ Every day we hear this and the like, yet we are still nailed to earth⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ I know that some people believe that comparing every flesh to grass refers to the condition of primitive people from different nations, with various ways of life, who, coming to faith, have become, by the Word of God, as harmonious as the righteous⁵.

St. Irenaeus

3. THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE PLAN OF GOD

Now, having demonstrated that whoever attaches himself to perishable things will become like the grass of earth, that withers; while he, who attaches himself to the Word of the eternal God, will stay with Him forever, he proclaims the significance of the attachment to the Word of God:

a. Receiving the joyful evangelic gospel: *“O Zion, You who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him.’” (Is. 40: 9, 10)*

Who is she, who lifts her voice, but the Church of the New Testament, that lifts up humanity as though on the mountain of the Word of God, through the preaching of the disciples and apostles, as well as through the testimony of all the people. She lifts up souls toward the heavenly life, or the new life, that came to us in Christ Jesus, to encounter our Lord Savior, as a Source of joy. She sees Him coming to her to reign in her depths, and to establish His kingdom by His exalted arm.

¹ *Ibid* 103.

² *Ibid* 62.

³ *On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed* 16:24.

⁴ *Ep. To Olympias* 1:1.

⁵ *Adv. Haer.* 5:33:4.

b. Apprehending the nature of God: As we are lifted up to the new life and encounter God on a personal level, we do not find him as an unknown hidden power, but as a being, dealing with us, “comes, rules, reward, and tends etc.” And as **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says in his response to Eunomius: [Is God, then, an energy, and not a person?!¹]

St. John Cassian says that when we hear the word “his arm” or the like, we should not understand it according to a material physical sense.

c. Discovering God’s care for us, being the Shepherd who tends His flock (Is. 40: 11): He is unique in His person, as well as in his care:

* He is the Creator, and almighty in His providence to us: **“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?, measured heaven with a span? and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales? and the hills in a balance?” (Is. 40: 12)**

He is the Creator of waters and heavens, of dust and solid mountains; and He who created, can renew the creation.

Waters refer to nations, heaven to soul, earth to flesh, and mountains and hills to man’s capabilities and possibilities. As if God, in His care, is capable of renewing the Church through adding nations to it; as He renews every soul together with the flesh, with its energies, feelings, emotions, and possibilities.

He measures and weighs everything, as He is the absolute Power.

He probably wanted to confirm that God, who cares for His dumb creation, from waters to heaven, even for dust, mountains, and hills, how can He not care for us, who He created according to His image? He created the entire world for our sake!

❖ If you doubt God’s care ask the earth, the heaven, the sun, and the moon; ask the dumb creatures and the plants... ask the rocks, the mountains, the sand dunes, and hills; ask the day and night. God’s care is much more clear than the sun and its rays. Everywhere, in the wilderness and the inhabited cities, on earth and in the sea.... wherever you go, you will hear a testimony of that exalted care².

St. John Chrysostom

* All-wisdom: **“Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel? and who instructed Him?, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding?” (Is. 40: 13, 14)**

¹ *Against Eunom.* 2:12.

² *Institutions* 8:3.

Being the almighty Creator who created and cared for nature for our sake, He is likewise, with His 'all-wisdom' knows what is for our salvation and our edification. His planning is different from ours, and His ordinances are high above ours (Romans 11: 34).

- ❖ The apostle Paul (Romans 11) did not just say that God's judgments are unreachable, but that His ways are past finding out. Man is not only incapable of understanding their aim, but he cannot even discover how it was first planned¹.
- ❖ He wants to say that He is the Fountain and Source of all goodness; He is in no need of a partner or a counselor².

St. John Chrysostom

* He is the Almighty; nothing escapes His hands: ***“Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance. Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing.” (Is. 40: 15)***

He is the Almighty. If nations wish to control the world, and reign on it through power and violence, yet they are actually very weak, are seen by God as a drop of water in a bucket, or as small dust on a balance. While God, even in (the weakness and ignorance of the cross), reigns and rules with power and authority over the depths.

The earth with all its nations, according to the Savior, is very tiny, carried by Him as dust in a small balance. As to the inhabitants of islands, proud of their military and commercial ships, they are all like a small dust held in the hand of God!

- ❖ God apprehends in Himself all creation, for every thing to be controlled by His power that embraces all³.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

* His interest in nations: ***“Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.” (Is. 40 16, 17)***

A poetic description of the receiving of faith in God by nations that all trees of Lebanon are not sufficient for God's altar fires, and all its animals are not enough for burnt offerings. There is great need of the wood of the cross that is more exalted above all the trees of Lebanon, and the sacrifice of Christ, incomparable to all animal sacrifices. Through this altar (the cross) and this sacrifice all nations will enjoy salvation.

¹ العناية الإلهية للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، ترجمة عابدة حنا بسطا، ص19.

² المرجع السابق، ص8-9.

³ *Against Eunomius. 2:11.*

- ❖ The divine living Lamb has come to the altar, and the crucifiers are offering Him as a Sacrifice!
- ❖ Our Lord was crucified, carried on Himself the trespasses of the universe, and nailed the sin with nails, so as not to reign. He crucified it with Him on Golgotha to prevent it from killing further generations.

Mar Jacob El-Serougi

* The greatness of the Lord Christ, the Savior and the sacrifice: ***“To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?” (Is. 40: 18)*** Idols are very costly; they need gold, silver or wood that would not rot, beside the cost of a skilled craftsman to make them (Is. 40: 20), beside the probability of being stolen. But our Christ offers free salvation, proclaims His kingdom in the heart, where nobody can steal it from our depths.

* ***“He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth” (Is. 40: 22)***

At that time the earth was believed to be flat, and not a globe, but Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on the “circle” of the earth, as a King on His throne, setting His Kingdom in the hearts of men.

* ***“Its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in” (Is. 40: 22)*** He does not reign out of need for the service of those who are on earth or in heaven, but out of love and fatherly care. The earthly things are, according to Him, like grasshoppers, and heaven like a canopy or tent. The elite are to Him like nothing and judges as false will vanish. Although earth and heaven are like nothing compared to His might, yet in His love, He rules and reigns on the earthly beings and heavenly hosts as a King and Savior.

Astrologers were busy doing their calculations for celestial objects, but God knows all their details, as their Creator, ***“He calls them all by name.” (Is. 40: 26)*** How then can He not know and care for the salvation of every man?

4. THE SITUATION OF UNBELIEVERS

Those who deny faith in God often assume that God is far away from the range of humans. He is in His heavens, while man lives in his world. That is the essence of the contemporary atheistic thought, used by the enemy to strike man, to let him lose his relationship, unity, and fellowship with his Creator; and as it came here in this Book: ***“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God?’” (Is. Is. 40: 27)***

That is what man says amid his spiritual trouble. He counts himself isolated even from God, who does not care for man’s way nor his life. That was probably what the captives said, assuming that God had completely forgotten them; months and years have passed, and it seems

that He had broken His covenants with their forefathers. He gives them no thought and doesn't care for their return. He doesn't care for their case, had forsaken them in Babylon, and stayed in His heavens with no move to remove their disgrace, and to uplift their humiliation and servitude.

The prophet responds to that as follows:

a. Continuity of God's work: God, in His love may delay, but is persistent on His care for mankind, ***“The everlasting God, the Lord; the Creator of the ends of the earth... Neither faints nor is weary.” (Is. 40: 28)***

b. God delivers through unexpected ways: ***“There is no searching of His understanding.” (Is. 40: 28)*** He saves by unexpected ways.

c. Because of our sins, our faith weakens; yet ***“He gives strength to the weak, an to those who have no might He increases strength.” (Is. 40: 29)*** That is why we should surrender the matter in His hands; He will support even our faith

d. He grants us His Holy Spirit who renews our nature, and lifts us up by the wings of the Spirit, as though to heaven itself, we are lifted without anxiety. ***“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)***

❖ By the Holy Spirit we become free of servitude and called to freedom!

By it we became children of God, through adoption!

Above all, if I may say, we are renewed, casting off the hateful burden of sins!

He grants us forgiveness of sins! He purifies us from every disgrace!

Through his gift, we turn from humans to angels, those who share with us the enjoyment of His grace. Yet, we shall not become like that instantly. What is amazing is that, while as yet in human nature, we behave in life like angels!

That is the power of the Spirit!¹

St. John Chrysostom

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، ص 836-837.

CHAPTER 41

SALVATION FROM THE EAST

The last chapter presented us with a magnificent portrait of the work of salvation, coming from God, the Almighty, the all-knowledge, Wisdom, and Love. And now, God is calling all the earth, even the islands - represented at that time the far west - to stand for judgment before Him, in order to discern truth from false. He is not seeking fire from heaven as did Elijah, to reveal the vanity of Baal, but He is requesting from them to ask their idols to reveal the future, if they can! As for God, He reveals to Isaiah things to come: about the coming of Cyrus from the east to deliver His people, confirming that He is the Lord of history and God of all nations, who utilizes all sources, even the pagan, to realize His care for His children, the sanctified in His Truth. That salvation is a symbol and a preparation for a greater salvation to be realized by the Savior Messiah, who is the center of this whole book, but the center of the Holy Bible as a whole.

1. **A conquest from the east** 1-7.
2. **My Servant, whom I have chosen** 8-12.
3. **The feeble worm becomes a threshing sledge** 13-16.
4. **The wasteland turns into a garden** 17-20.
5. **God, Lord of the future** 21-29.

1. A CONQUEST FROM THE EAST

The prophet presents a splendid poetic portrait for the conquest, that Israel will get through Cyrus, who allows their return from captivity. The prophet confirms that what Cyrus will do is not through his own option, but is a divine ordination:

“Keep silent before Me, O coastlands. And let the people renew their strength! Let them come near, then let them speak.; Let us come near together for judgment” (Is. 41: 1)

He is asking the distant islands, surrounded by water from all sides - a reference to Israel, captivated in Babylon far from home, surrounded by waters of temptations to drown it, asking it, first to listen, to keep silent, then to speak and debate with God, as though in a trial between two equals.

Listening and silence do not imply passivity, but mean lifting up the heart to God, and contemplating on His amazing works, anticipating His continuous salvation for His people and Church. Silent prayer moves heaven itself, to which God listens and responds, as what did happen with Moses crying in his heart (Exodus 14: 15), and with Hannah in the temple (1 Samuel 1: 13).

❖ Let us look now at the silent prayer of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, how it found pleasure

before God, how it opened up the barren womb, cast away the disgrace, and granted her a Nazirite and a judge¹.

Fr. Aphrahat

- ❖ Jonah prayed with no voice (Jonah 2). Although the preacher kept silent in the belly of the whale, yet his prayer ascended to God in the heights, as though it was a scream².

St. Ephram the Syrian

- ❖ If your mouth is speechless your heart is aflame with the fire of the Spirit!
If you speak with your tongue, while your heart is not moving in prayer, your words are in vain!

Keep your tongue silent to let your heart speak... Keep your heart silent to let God speak!

St. John Saba

- ❖ Silence makes you shine like sun, and purifies you of ignorance.
- ❖ You can identify a man of God by his silence!

St. Isaac the Syrian

- ❖ Those who stand in the presence of Christ, concentrating their attention on divine things, freeing themselves of worldly affairs, always keep the secret prayer of the heart, and the spiritual thought of the mind, rejecting every worldly thinking that darkens the soul, driving it away, lest it would distract their minds from God.
- ❖ I wish, brethren, we can cast away the weight of worldly interests to spend all our time in thoughts of God; By this we purify ourselves, and soar up in the heavenlies toward God. The divine words rid the mind of rust, free it of the burden of temporary matters, and lift it up to behold the Deity.
- ❖ Let us pray in a secret way, with humility of heart, with no tendency of haughtiness or pride, concerning appearances of prayers that deprive us of the reward.

Fr. Martyrus³

Silence should be accompanied by an internal conversation of love, between God and the soul. At the beginning of this book, God asks us to “*reason together*” to gain forgiveness of sin (Is. 1: 18). Here, He wants us to come forward and speak with Him through the language of silence, to hearken Him by our inner ears, and debate with Him by the tongues of heart; to have our spiritual insight opened, to apprehend from near the mysteries of God’s salvation.. That is

¹ *Demon. 4 on Prayer, 7.*

² *Hymn of Faith 20:9.*

³ *The book of Perfection 43,45,82.*

what He meant by saying, Let them come forward and speak (Is. 41: 1).

Fr. Martyrus says, [Let us do like Mary, sister of Lazarus who sat at the feet of our Lord, listening to His words (Luke 10: 30; John 11: 1). By her love she had herself lifted up to heaven through His words, for which she became worthy of the good testimonial of our Lord: “*Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.*” (Luke 10: 42) Let us simulate that blessed woman in choosing that good part; for God is, up till now, close to us]¹.

What did the prophet Isaiah see and hear, while coming forward in silence toward God?

“Who raised up one from the east? Who in righteousness called him to His feet? Who gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? Who gave them as the dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow? (Is. 41: 2)

Literally, he means Cyrus, stirred by God from the east, granting him conquest wherever he goes, meaning that He gives him the ability of swift action. Victory accompanies him and his army everywhere. Most scholars believe that Cyrus the destroyer of Babylon was known for his justice, though his army and men were reputed for violence and fierceness. He became a symbol of the Lord Christ in His salvation, not from the captivity of Babylon or others, but from that of the devil and sin.

In certain Septuagint versions, he was called “righteous;” and it was believed by some Jewish scholars, that talk here referred to Abraham the Patriarch, who came from the east to possess through his descendants the land of Canaan. The Fathers of the Church, on the other hand, all along the ages, as for instance St. Jerome, Cyril, Eusebius, Theodoret, and Procopius believe that it referred to the Messiah².

The Hebrew word for conquest came as “*sedek*,” meaning “righteousness, divine reign, or conquest”³. As the Lord Christ, the righteous and the only One with no sin, came with His own righteousness, to grant it to us. His conquest is not through wars and sensual strife, but through abiding us in His righteousness.

The sword of Christ and His bow are His evangelic word that turns evil into dust and chaff; yet purifies souls from any defilement; by that He reigned over nations, destroying every evil in them.

“Who pursued them, and passed safely by the way that he had not gone with his feet?” (Is. 41: 3)

Cyrus came so swiftly, that he seemed as though he does not touch the ground with his feet. This refers also to how swift the preaching of the gospel of salvation, or the work of salvation of Christ, had spread.

¹ *Ibid* 46:47.

² *Bultema*, p. 390.

³ *R.N. Whybray: New Century Bible Comm., Isaiah 40-60; p. 61.*

That salvation is to be realized through God Himself, who is “the First,” worked and is still working in the life of His people from the beginning till the end (Is. 41: 4).

The Lord presented a query in the judgment of people, and as nobody answered it, He did that Himself:

“Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning ‘I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I am He.’” (Is. 41: 4)

It is He who called the generations from the beginning to approach Him and to enjoy His salvation; and even with others (the appearance of pagan idols), he stays on His love, with no change, all along the ages.

From the beginning, He called forth humanity to live with Him. Yet it rejected the Creator, and made for itself futile gods, incapable of fending for themselves. These gods are works of a craftsman, a goldsmith, of he who smoothes with the hammer, and who strikes with the anvil, each encouraging the other to produce a good handicraft, ***“nailed down, so it will not topple.” (Is. 41: 7)***

There is no way of comparison between idols that need to be made, repaired, and protected, and Christ, the Creator, who acts with practical love to renew our unstable corrupt nature.

Revealing the futility of idol worship, He proclaims the weakness of nations, to call them to the greatness of Christ, who is, alone, capable of salvation!

2. MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN

He reveals the weakness and confusion of the nations, proclaims that they are nothing but dust and chaff (Is. 41: 2); and invites them to join the new Israel, to enjoy - through the work of salvation of Christ - the divine friendship that was experienced by Abraham the father of believers, saying,

“But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend...” (Is. 41: 8)

He chose Abraham as a friend of His, called him from a pagan nation that does not know God, to become righteous, ***“stirred him up from the east, and handed nations over to him.” (Is. 41: 2)*** God had never changed; He still seeks to justify and calls children from among unbelievers to receive faith in Him, and to become His friends.

❖ Abraham, called friend, had been found a believer, as he obeyed God’s words¹.

St. Clement of Rome

Who is that chosen Servant but the Lord Christ, who occupied the position of a servant to represent the weak humanity, and set a covenant in its name with God the Father, sealing it with

¹ Ep. 1:10.

His precious blood; and as said by **St. Gregory of Nazianzus**: [He was called a Servant to serve many in Truth... He came a Servant in flesh and by birth, for the sake of our life, to set us free, and to save us from the servitude of sin¹.]

The incarnated Word of God became a Servant, so that as we, the servants, abide in Him, we hear the divine voice calling us:

“O, Israel, My servant”: You, strangers and foreigners, have become the new Israel, a holy Church, and a justified people, good servants, united with the Only-Begotten Son who became a Servant.

“Jacob, whom I have chosen;” and as the Lord Christ said to His disciples: **“You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.”**

“Descendants of Abraham, My friend”: You have spiritually become children to Abraham, in faith; thus counted as friends of Mine, as was your father.

“You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions. Fear not, for I am with you.” (Is. 41: 9 - 10) That was the mystery of my choice for you, the aim of salvation, to be with you.

“I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Is. 41: 10) I shall become for you a help and support, as I justified you by My blood to become worthy of every help and support against your oppressors, who will be nothing and perish, against your enemies whom you will search and will not find (Is. 41: 11).

In the old days, you used nails to fix the golden and silver plates to the wooden idols, so it will not topple (Is. 41: 7), to give them an outer beauty, and a high value. But now, I uphold you with the right hand that you will remain stable, I pour My glory on you, and grant you My righteousness. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand; I say to you: **“Do not fear, for I am with you.” (Is. 41: 10)**

In this book he often repeats the phrase: **“Do not fear,”** as God is aware of that serious sickness of humanity, namely, fear, destructive to our inner peace, joy, and glory. The cause of that fear is our feeling of isolation and solitude; no companion, helper, nor anyone who may realize and share our inner feelings. That is why the Savior Himself comes to accompany us, not from outside, but by dwelling in our depths; filling the inside void place, to become for us the companion, the helper, and the satisfaction of all our inner needs; who shares our hidden feelings.

In short, what does the Lord, our Savior offer us? He offers us Himself, to grant us company, help, and strength. He lifts us up to Him! In other word, He descends to us, to receive Him in our life, to support us with His grace, to carry us to share His heavenly eternal glories.

¹ Theolog. Orations 4:3.

3. THE FEEBLE WORM BECOMES A THRESHING SLEDGE

The three words “*Do not fear*” have been repeated three times in verses 10-14; that was necessary for the miserable souls, destroyed by despair, because of captivity and feelings of humiliation and servitude. But God by all means comforts His faithful believers, who accept entering with Him in a covenant, to spare them from fear. The source of their hope and strength is their enjoyment of Him as their King, who offers Himself to them, saying, “*For I the Lord, your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you fear not.*” (Is. 41: 13)

God refers Himself to them: “*I am the Lord, your God,*” to take refuge in Him, not as a stranger, but as their “**Lord, their God,**” their own, who is longing to embrace them and keep them in Him. So, it is fitting for them, not to be slow to seek His help, as His longing for their salvation is far more than their longing for their own. That is why He keeps on saying, “**Do not fear, I will help you.**”

It is to be noticed that God calls Himself, “*I am the Lord, your God.*” So if He called Himself “*Jehovah*” (Exodus 3: 14, 15; 6: 2), when He invited Moses to save the people from the servitude of Pharaoh; He proclaimed to him the mystery of His name, which is: “*I Am Who I Am,*” confirming, that He exists all the time, dwells amid His people, with no change to His love or care. He presents Himself by several names, in order to strengthen the faith of His believers, including¹:

“*The Lord will provide*” (Genesis 22: 14), as Abraham saw with the eyes of faith, the unique Sacrifice of Christ, the Grantor of the power of resurrection.

“*The Lord Shalom*” (Judges 6: 24), meaning “The Lord is peace;” as Christ, the Word of God is our peace (Ephesians 2: 14). By Him we enjoy reconciliation with God, as the mystery of our inner peace, and our peace with others.

“*I am the Lord who heals you*” (*Jehovah-rophaka*) (Exodus 15: 26). He longs to heal our souls and bodies, as the true Physician of humanity.

“*The Lord Our Righteousness*” (*Jehovah-Zidkenu*) (Jeremiah 23: 6); as in Christ we become righteous (1 Corinthians 1: 30), we bear the fellowship of His nature, and enjoy His righteousness in us.

“*The Lord is my Banner*” (*Jehovah-nissi*) (Exodus 17: 15). He goes before me in my spiritual battle. He is the Source of my conquest, and the Sign of my victory over the devil.

“*Jehovah - Yah*” (Is. 12: 2), namely, “*I Am Who I Am,*” being always present amid His believers; His love for them never changes.

“*The Lord is there*” (*Jehovah-Shammah*) (Ezekiel 48: 35); referring to the proclamation of God’s presence in the Church of the New Testament; amid the new Israel; having become the

¹ Bultema, p. 396.

icon of heaven, The dwelling of God with men (See Revelation 21: 3).

God proclaims His love for His people whom He called “*the worm of Israel*,” to turn it into a “*threshing sledge*,” new and sharp, with many teeth, capable of threshing and crushing mountains, reducing hills to chaff, for the gale to blow them away, saying,

“Fear not, you worm Jacob, You men of Israel! I will help you,’ says the Lord and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth. You shall thresh the mountains and beat them small, and make the hills like chaff. You shall winnow them, the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them. You shall rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the Holy One of Israel.” (Is. 41: 14-16)

That is the work of God the Savior in our life, turning us from a despised worm, trodden by feet, into a threshing sledge with sharp teeth, capable of threshing mountains, crushing them, like a tool that separates wheat from chaff. As such, God wishes to befriend the despised worm, to turn it into a tool for discernment between the good wheat and the worthless chaff.

God called His people “*worm Jacob*,” that helplessly lives despised in the mud, without beauty or glory, carelessly trodden upon by feet. Pharaoh had done that, then died; but the people have enjoyed God’s promises and salvation. Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar also trodden over this worm; then both the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon collapsed with their mighty kings, leaving the worm alive and glorious. Afterwards, along the generations came several mighty kings like Nero and Diocletian, beside heretics like Arius and Nestor, all came and died, but the worm survived, grew and flourished. The mystery of her life, has been, that the incarnated Word of God, likewise became for our sake, a worm, according to the Psalmist: “*I am a worm and not a man*” (Psalm 22: 6), taking upon Himself to become so despised, as to be counted as a worm; in order to lift us up, through His humility, to His glory.

❖ “*I am a worm and not a man*” (Psalm 22: 6). But here I am talking, not on behalf of Adam, but of Myself - I Jesus Christ - who was not humanly conceived according to the flesh, in order to become a man, and less so than all men, “*A reproach of men and despised of the people.*” (Psalm 22: 6) Through humility I became scorned by men to hear it sarcastically said: “*You are His disciple.*” (John 9: 28)¹

St. Augustine

Attached to the Lord, we will be turned from a weak and helpless worm into a threshing sledge, capable of crushing mountains, that refer to deeds of the old man, in order to enjoy the blessings of the new life.

If our old man has become, through his wicked deeds, like solid immovable mountains, it

¹ On Ps. 22.

is only God who can let the mountains smoke by His touch (Psalm 104: 32). He can make of us, by Christ Jesus, a new sharp threshing sledge, to crush mountains, and reduce the hills into chaff; never to lose our strength or weaken with age. That is what makes our souls rejoice in the Lord, the Renewer of our life, to have pride in the New Holy One of Israel¹.

4. THE WASTELAND TURNS INTO A GARDEN

As the prophet Isaiah looks forward to the messianic age as one of the waters of the Holy Spirit, he beholds the wasteland turning into an oasis flooding with water, to become a fruitful divine garden.

This simulation was repeated several times (Is. 35: 1.10; 43: 18. 21; 40: 9. 11; 48: 21; 55: 13). In the old days God let water come out of the rock, for His thirsty people (Exodus 17: 1 - 7; 20: 1 - 13; Is. 48: 21). In the second exodus He does what is greater. He let rivers gush on barren heights, and springs in valleys; as the Lord Christ offers new water to change the face of the world, to turn the wasteland of our hearts into His spiritual paradise, and our inner wilderness into a divine oasis, to have in us spiritual trees to grow and produce delicious spiritual fruits:

“I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree... That may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.” (Is. 41: 19, 20)

How beautiful is this phrase, to behold the work of the Lord in us, to recognize His mysteries, to contemplate in the exalted things, and to understand that all this was done and created by the Holy Savior.

St. John Chrysostom says on the Savior’s tongue:

[Who could match my goodness? I am a father, a brother, a groom, a home, food, clothing, and source of everything you wish for; I shall never leave you in need of anything!

I shall be also a Servant to you, as I came, not to be served, but to serve.

I am likewise, a friend, a member, a head, a brother, a sister, and a mother; I am everything... just be My friend!

For your sake I became poor, and turned into a beggar!

For your sake I prayed, and was buried!

In heaven I intercede to the Father on your behalf!

For Me you are everything... a brother, a partner in inheritance, and a friend!

What more do you want?

Why do you desert Him who loves you, and labor for the world?²]

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981م، ص13.

² In Matt. PG. 58:79C.

5. GOD, THE LORD OF THE FUTURE

In order to comfort His people and let them trust in Him He confirms to them that all the future is in His hands, and not in the hands of gods of other nations. He calls them to ask the idols, if they could tell about future things - meaning particularly the coming of Cyrus, as something not to be expected.

God proclaims Himself as the First to provide His people with a '*messenger of good tidings*,' that of the coming of Cyrus (Is. 41: 27).

Cyrus - on his father's side - was a Mede; while - on his mother's - he was a Persian. His army included men from Mede, coming from the north (Is. 41: 25), and others from Persia, coming from the east (Is. 41: 25). The Lord Christ, likewise, came from Nazareth in the north, and He, as the Sun of righteousness, has come from the east.

Cyrus knew God (Ezra 1), and respected all religions, including the one worshipping the living God. That is why it was said: "***One from the rising sun, he shall call on My name.***" (Is. 41: 25) He was also probably considered as a symbol of the Lord Christ, who realizes salvation for the whole world. Cyrus was likened to "***a potter was treading clay,***" as a reference to the Lord Christ, as the Judge, to whom all nations submit, like clay in the hands of a potter. Cyrus treaded on Babylon, as though a mortar (Is. 41: 25).

CHAPTER 42

THE CHOSEN SERVANT OF THE LORD

This chapter includes one of the enjoyable praises to the Lord Christ, namely the praises of the ‘**Servant of Jehovah**’ (Isaiah 42: 1 - 4; 49: 1- 6; 50: 4 - 9; 52: 13; 53: 12). Some scholars tried to apply this praise on our hands on Israel, on Isaiah, or on Cyrus. Yet, it is very obvious that it concerns the Lord Christ Himself, as confirmed by the Evangelists (Matthew 12: 17 - 21).

- 1. The chosen Servant of the Lord 1-4.**
- 2. Calling the Servant of the Lord 5-9.**
- 3. The new praise 10-13.**
- 4. Forsaking the works of the old man 14-17.**
- 5. A call to the deaf and the blind people 18-25.**

1. THE CHOSEN SERVANT OF THE LORD

The praise here presents to us the Person of the chosen Servant of the Lord, the Lord Christ Himself; saying,

(1) “***Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights.***” (Is. 42: 1) It is not strange for the Messiah to be called “*the Servant of Jehovah,*” or “*the Servant of the Lord,*” although He is His Word, eternally begotten, and One with Him in divine essence. But, with His divine love, He yearned to descend to our humility, to carry us up to His glory; and as our representative, He obeyed the Father to the point of death - death by the cross, in order to realize our salvation, and to abide us in Him, to be counted as obedient, “*according to the good pleasure of His will.*” (Ephesians 1: 3 - 5)

The Father had chosen His Only-Begotten Son to realize salvation through Him, proclaiming the perfection of divine love. The Son, the Subject of the Father’s pleasure and love, also chooses us by abiding in Him, and enjoying the membership in His body!

The word “***My Elect***” does not imply choosing one out of many, but refers to the greatness of the Father’s love toward the Messiah; and as said by the Lord Christ Himself: “*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you, abide in My love.*” (John 15: 9) “*That the love with which You loved Me, may be in them, and I in them.*” (John 17: 26)

This love is described by the words: “***In whom My soul delights.***” (Is. 42: 1) As the Father’s delight in Him is eternal, it was proclaimed when the Lord was baptized, when He was transfigured, and through all stages of His salvation works.

The evangelist St. Matthew quoted what came here in Isaiah 42: 1-3 as a clear prophecy

about the Lord Christ (Matthew 12: 17-21), confirming the following points¹:

- a. The One chosen to consummate salvation.
- b. In Him, the Father delights in us.
- c. The pleasure and hope of nations.
- d. By meekness He grants conquest.
- e. He is compassionate toward the weak.

St. Augustine comments on this text saying, [The expression “*My Servant*” refers to the image of that Servant, as the Most High “made Himself of no reputation, and assumed the shape of a Servant...” was given the Holy Spirit, proclaimed like a dove (John 1: 32). He issued the ‘Truth’ to the nations, proclaiming to them what was hidden from them. In His humility He does not shout or cry out, without stopping to proclaim the Truth. His voice is not raised in the streets, not heard by those outside, as those out of His body did not obey Him. He did not break the Jews, who prosecuted Him, although they were “a bruised reed” that lost its equilibrium, neither He snuffed them out, although they were “a smoldering wick,” but forgave them. He came, not to judge, but to be condemned².]

Our Christ, of whom it is said: “*My Elect One in whom I delight*,” came in order for us to realize that, in Him we are chosen by the Father, who loved and delighted in Him. And as the apostle Paul says, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.*” (Ephesians 1: 3 - 5)

(2) “*I will put My Spirit upon Him.*” (Is. 42: 1) The Messiah is the Father’s Word, One with Him and equal to Him, in the same essence. That is why the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Father, is also that of the Son. The Holy Spirit is not a stranger from the Son. He enjoys it with no limit and with no separation. The Holy Spirit that sanctified the womb of the Virgin Mary to realize the divine incarnation has never forsaken the Son. He took the Lord Christ up the mount of temptation, to let Him go through the decisive battle with the devil. It is the Spirit that He gave to His disciples, in order to carry out their work of preaching in Christ Jesus. It is the Spirit He gave to the Church as a whole on the day of the Pentecost, to support her to testify to Him, in worship and in daily life. By that, He realized what He promised in His farewell talks (John 14: 16 - 18, 26; 15: 26; 16: 7, 8, 13, 14). And as said by **St. Clement of Alexandria**: [God

¹ راجع للمؤلف: الإنجيل بحسب متى، 1987م، ص 273-275.

² *City of God* 20:30.

has created man from dust, renewed him by water, and let him grow by the Spirit¹.]

St. Basil tells us about the work of the Holy Spirit in us, saying, [By the Holy Spirit we regained our dwelling in Paradise, our ascension to the kingdom of heaven, our return to the divine prophecy, our privilege to call God “our Father,” our participation in the grace of Christ, being called the children of light, our right in the eternal glory, and in short, our gain of the consummation of blessing in this age and the coming age².]

(3) **“He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.” (Is. 42: 1)** God has chastised the nations yet He came to them, being “the Truth,” to let them receive it in their life, as a mystery of eternal salvation, saying, *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* (John 14: 6)³

- ❖ Christ dwells in the inner man, as said by the apostle (Ephesians 3: 16, 17); as to Him, the ability to behold the Truth is referred, saying, “I am the Truth.” (John 14: 6)
- ❖ He Himself is Life, and the Truth. I pray He comes to save us, to separate the wheat from the tares!⁴

St. Augustine

- ❖ I cry out in a quiet and low voice, saying, ‘O You hidden within me, proclaim Your hidden mystery in me. Reveal to me Your beauty, that is inside me. O, You who created me a temple for His dwelling, cover me with the cloud of Your glory, inside Your temple!’⁵

St. John Saba

(4) **“He will not cry out, or raise His voice.” (Is. 42: 2)** He came to proclaim the voice of love, practical and quiet, through giving up even to the cross. His pulpit is the cross, and His words are the wounds of His body, uttering Love! The Word of God came to teach us the life of true work emerging from love, together with tranquility and quietness of the soul in Him, in place of preoccupation with plenty of words, shining with deceiving appearances. The divine Word taught us how to talk with love, and the practical life in order to be transfigured in us!

- ❖ If you are quiet, you will acquire peace wherever you live!⁶

Fr. Piamon

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 866.

² *De Spirit. Sanct. 15.*

³ *On Ps. 4.*

⁴ *On Ps. 43.*

⁵ الحب الإلهي، ص 62.

⁶ *Cf. Apophthegmata. Poemen. 84.*

❖ I often regretted what I said, but I never regretted being silent!

St. Arsanus

(5) ***“A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax, He will not quench.” (Is. 42:***

3) Our Christ came to the broken souls to bring them hope, not to hurt the feelings of sinner nor to flatter them, to utter the Truth with love, so as to treat every raw wound, and to support every tired soul.

- ❖ Christ came to call us meekly and humbly so as not to frighten us off, saying, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* Thus the Lord didn’t close His door before us nor He cast us away.” (Matthew 11: 28)
- ❖ We should know that the Lord is a God of mercy, leaning more to forgiveness than to severity; that is why He said: *“I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.”* (Hosea 6: 6)
- ❖ When we refuse repentance, we are as if saying, ‘We shall not have a wounded in our hotel, and nobody will be healed in our Church. We do not care for the sick, being all well, we are in no need for a Physician,’ for He himself said: *“The well do not need a physician but the sick.”*
- ❖ O God, send messengers to the streets of town to collect the good and the bad, and to bring into your Church the weak, the blind, and the lame (Luke 14: 21). Give the order O God, to fill Your house with the sinners, bring them to your banquet, for You recreate the one who follows You when You call.
- ❖ You should not fear from perdition, whatever your condition is, or the depth of your fall. As the good Samaritan, a symbol of the Lord Christ, the Shepherd of souls, on His way from Jerusalem to Jericho, will pass by you, will not forsake you, and with compassion, He will heal you. The good Samaritan didn’t forsake the one who lied down there between life and death for he saw that there is still life in his breath thus hoped for his healing¹.

St. Cyprian

(6) ***“He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.” (Is. 42: 4)***

Our Christ is characterized by practical love and meekness. In His love He opens the gates of hope before sinners, whatever their evil is, unlike man, who is cruel to his brother and think of himself as more righteous than the others, closes that gate before many. That divine meek love is consistent up to the point of death, death of the cross. In that He wasn’t broken down but was glorified by resurrection, and proclaimed the Truth by realizing salvation.

¹ On Repentance.

Some scholars¹ try to interpret the word “*coastlands*” here that it’s Europe or the United States or Australia.

2. CALLING THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

God, in His love, created heaven and earth for man (Is. 42: 5), and here He is calling the Son, who became man, “*to give Him as a covenant for the people, as a Light for the Gentiles*” (Is. 42: 6), to open up the inner insight, to behold the kingdom of God, “*to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.*” (Is. 42: 7)

What does it mean to designate the call of the Servant of the Lord, as a “*Covenant*”? Being the Son of God, who became a Son of Man, He was capable of reconciling the Father with humanity, in His human body. In Him, as the Father saw, that humanity was sanctified and became worthy of adoption to Him, He proclaimed His eternal fatherhood for it in His Only-Begotten Son. In Him, humanity, likewise, saw the love of the Father, who delivered His Only-Begotten Son for the sake of its salvation, to find a share in His fatherly bosom. That is the covenant set in Christ Jesus, which He sealed by His precious blood on the cross. That is why He is called “*The Messenger of the Covenant.*” (Malachi 3: 1)

Trypho the Jewish scholar tried to interpret what came here about the covenant and the light for the Gentiles, as concerning the Mosaic Law. **St. Justin the Martyr** responded to his claim by saying, that if the Law has been able to grant enlightenment and edification to the Gentiles, and to all who receive it, what would then be the need to talk about a new covenant?

But God proclaimed in advance, that He is going to introduce a new covenant and an eternal Law and commandment; That should not be understood as referring to the old Law, but rather, to Christ and to those who believe in Him - that is to say to us, who were previously of the Gentiles, then enjoyed enlightenment. God says, “*In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You. I will preserve You and give You as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages.*” (Is. 49: 8) What is the inheritance of Christ? Are they not the Gentiles? What is the covenant of God, but the Lord Christ? As it came somewhere else: “*You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession*” (Psalm 2: 7)²

St. Justin the Martyr again comments on the divine saying, “*My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images.*” (Is. 42: 8) [I shall say to the Jews: Do not you apprehend, my friends, that God gives glory to Him, whom He set as enlightenment to the nations, and not to anybody else?³]

¹ Bultema. P. 404.

² Justin: Dial. with Trypho 122.

³ Ibid 65.

The Holy Trinity, being the One God in essence and Deity, gets whatever glories the Savior Son gets.

“I will give You as a covenant to the people” (Is. 42: 6)

We have already studied the role of “the covenant” among the primitive societies in the Old Testament, and lastly in the New Testament, when the Lord Christ offered His mystery Blood in the Chalice as a New Covenant for believers to share. That Blood, the sacrifice of Christ, capable of setting a Covenant between the Father and man, grants us a spiritual heavenly relationship, to be truly counted as children abiding in the Son, the Only-Begotten, through which we enjoy the life-giving heavenly banquet¹.

Fr. Theodore says, [In our communion of the Body and Blood of the Groom we enter with Him in a marital union².]

“(I will give You) as a light for the Gentiles.” (Is. 42: 6) Christ is the divine light that opens up our inner insight to behold the light. The Psalmist says, “*With Your light, O Lord, we behold light,*” and the evangelist says, “*The true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world.*” (John 1: 9)

❖ “*Send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill, and to Your tabernacle.*” (Ps. 43: 3)

“Light” and “Truth” are actually two names for God. For what is the divine light but the divine truth? And what is the divine truth but the divine light? The Person of Christ is both of them. “*I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness.*” (John 8: 12) “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*” (John 14: 6) He Himself is the Light, and He also is the Truth, let Him then come to save us³.

❖ My God... You are My Light; open up my eyes to behold Your divine splendor, to be able to walk along my way without stumbling in the snares of the enemy.

Really, how can I avoid his snares unless I see them? And how can I see them unless I am enlightened by Your light?

You are the light for the children of light! Your day does not know a sunset! Your daylight keeps Your children from stumbling!

As to those who are outside of You they walk in darkness, and live in it!⁴

St. Augustine

❖ One lamp I behold, and with its light I get enlightened. And now I am in owe; I rejoice

¹ Fr. Malaty: *Christ in the Eucharist, book I (The Mystery of the New Testament)*, Alexandria, 1968.

² PG. 81:128B.

³ On Ps. 43.

⁴ الحب الإلهي، ص 70-71.

spiritually, having in me the fountain of life, He who is the unseen goal of the world!¹

St. John Saba

3. THE NEW PRAISE

“Sing to the Lord a new song, And His praise from the ends of the earth.” (Is. 42: 10)

What is this praise that is characterized by seriousness, uttered by men from the ends of the earth, but that of those redeemed, coming from all nations, tribes, people, and tongues, standing before the throne and the Lamb, *“Crying out with a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our Lord, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”* (Revelation 7: 10) It is a new song as it grants a persistent renewal, through the new life in Christ.

In this song, it is to be noticed:

a. It is a new song that would never get old, because it expresses the ever-young life of heavenly joy. Thus the moaning of creation would turn into a fellowship in the praise of the heavenly hosts.

b. It is a collective song performed by people from the ends of the earth, that reveals the joy of those dwelling on the earth, in the seas, and on the islands (Is. 42: 10); emerging from the depths of the inner heart, not of outer circumstances. That is why the believer sings it wherever he is: on land, in the sea, in the desert, in a town, in a village, or in a cave on the mountaintops (Is. 42: 10, 11).

c. The mystery of the joy lies in that Christ Himself is leading the spiritual battle: ***“He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud. He shall prevail against His enemies.” (Is. 42: 13)*** It is the song of conquest of Christ who shouts victoriously over the devil and all his evil hosts.

4. FORSAKING THE OLD

The mystery of our praise is forsaking of the works of the old man out of our depths, through our receiving those of the new man in Christ Jesus. It is an extremely amazing thing! Of which is said: ***“I have held My peace a long time, I have been still and restrained Myself.” (Is. 42: 14)***

He likens forsaking the old man, and enjoying the new man to a woman in childbirth, although suffering pain, yet she is delivering a new human being. So we are enjoying, through the Lord Christ, as though delivering a new world from within us. ***“Now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will pant and gasp at once.” (Is. 42: 14)***

He is also likening the great and small nations to mountains and hills, whose vegetation

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 75.

He will dry up (Is. 42: 15); will dry up their love for the temporary things that are like perishable grass; also likening them to rivers, He is going to dry up (Is. 42: 15); to dry up their ancient water, to grant them the living water.

Once more He likens them to blinds walking in darkness, who are in need of the removal of their blindness and darkness, in order to enjoy the light, and to walk along the new true spiritual way, instead of walking along crooked ones, saying, ***“I will bring the blind in a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light for them, and crooked places straight.”*** (Is. 42: 16)

5. A CALL TO THE DEAF AND THE BLIND PEOPLE

Many Fathers believe, that these deaf and blind people are the Jews, who did not listen to the voice of prophets concerning the Lord Christ, and whose eyes became blind to Him. The Lord chose them as a servant, yet only few of them received faith in the Savior, while many others denied Him. That is why He admonishes them saying,

“Hear you deaf, look you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is blind as he who is perfect, and blind as the Lord’s servant?” (Is. 42: 18, 10)

He calls them ‘*His servant*,’ having chosen them as His people to worship Him, and ‘*His messenger*,’ having chosen them to receive faith, and to preach Him, as messengers to proclaim salvation, and to testify to evangelical life. He called them, ‘*committed to Him*,’ as He expected them to be sanctified, having presented to them all possibilities of perfect life, and even that of preaching the Lord Christ, the Grantor of perfection. He rebukes them saying,

“Seeing many things, but you do not observe” (Is. 42: 20)

The Lord Christ came in their midst and performed miracles; They saw Him when other nations did not; Despite that they did not realize, that He is the Savior of the world, but enviously crucified Him! They saw Him in flesh, yet they did not comprehend His identity. ***“Opening the ears, but he does not hear.”*** (Is. 42: 20)

They heard the prophecies, as well as the voice of the Lord Christ, yet they did not respond to the voice of the prophets referring to Christ, nor to that of Christ Himself when He came. The fault was in them, and not in the Mosaic Law, as ***“The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake. He will magnify the law and make it honorable.”*** (Is. 42 21)

But the evil one robbed these people of the depths of the law, and the spiritual prophetic concept, to let them fall into the pit of denial of faith, he robbed them of the enjoyment of Him, to whom the law referred, with no one to give them back what they have lost (Is. 42: 21 - 22), because they fell under the divine wrath.

The Jews believe that what came in this section (Is. 42: 18 -25), does not apply to them, but to the pagans, or only to few people.

CHAPTER 43

NO SAVIOR BUT ME!

The previous chapter presented a gloomy portrait of how the people became, during the time of the Babylonian captivity, blind and deaf; having ears, yet they did not notice the work of God, nor heard His voice. This is a simple image of the work of sin in the life of humanity. There was need of divine intervention, as He only can redeem and save, can abolish any obstacle that may face His children, not expecting any reward on their part.

- 1. Fear not, for I am with you** **1-7.**
- 2. You are My witnesses** **8-13.**
- 3. The fall of Babylon** **14-15.**
- 4. A new exodus** **16-21.**
- 5. Salvation is a free gift** **22-28.**

1. FEAR NOT, FOR I AM WITH YOU

He starts His talk saying, “***But now***” (Is. 43: 1), as though God wishes to wipe out the previous image, that of the bitter captivity by sin, which deprived us of our inner insight, and soul ears. He does this by offering us His promises of salvation, and flooding us with His exalted grace.

God wishes us to move our eyes away from our miserable condition, and our minds from thinking about what sin has done to us; to look forward to the Redeemer and Savior; to spare us being destroyed by despair, but to get filled with hope.

Now, what is the role of the Redeemer from the captivity of sin?

a. It is only God the Creator, who can renew the creation: “***But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you.’***” (Is. 43: 1)

When Arius denied the deity of the Lord Christ, **St. Athanasius the Apostolic**, in his response to him, concentrated on the fact that the deity of the Lord is not just a theoretical philosophical dogma, but is something that touches our very salvation. Our human nature got completely corrupted, and became in need of the Creator to save our fallen nature and to get it back to its origin, granting it His image, and turning it from corruption into incorruption. In Him humanity overcomes death, and is recreated¹. There was a great need for the Son of God, the One with the Father and the equal in essence, to offer Himself a Sacrifice, that is capable of repaying

¹ *De Incarn.* 8,9.

the debt of our sins, and, at the same time, of realizing divine justice and mercy. It is God, the Conqueror of the devil, not for His own sake, but in the name and credit of humanity. Lastly, being the true God, He restored our dignity to us, granting us in Him an adoption to the Father, by the Holy Spirit.

St. Athanasius says, [He became man to turn us into gods¹.], [Although there is only one Son by nature - a true Son, Only-Begotten, yet we became children, not truly and by nature, but through His grace that calls us. Although we are humans on earth, yet we are called gods².]

St. John Chrysostom says, [Because of love, He compassionately took up our flesh; there is no other reason for His incarnation³.] [God did not condemn us for our several transgressions that we committed against Him despite His goodness to us, but, instead, gave us His Son; whom He turned, for our sake, into sin... He forsook Him to be convicted and to die as someone cursed... He, who did not know sin, He made Him as a sinner and a sin... He is like a king, watching a thief about to be executed, He sends His only Son, to put on Him the criminal's guilt, and even death itself! All that for the sake of salvation of the guilty, to lift him up to a great dignity⁴.] [The Lord Christ paid more than we deserve, as an ocean is compared to a drop of water⁵.]

By this we understand the prophetic words: **“This is what the Lord says, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you.’” (Is. 43: 1)**

b. A personal interest on the part of the Savior toward man. God has not created man, just as one being among billion others that He created, but He granted Him a special care, as a beloved creation. He knows man by name, calls and redeems him to become His that is to say to enjoy uniting with Him. How beautiful is the Redeemer's voice, as He addresses man, saying, **“Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name, you are mine” (Is. 43: 1)**

The mystery of redemption lies in God's exalted love. He wants me for Him, and Himself for me. He knows me by name, and invited me to enter with Him in a unique relationship of love. All He wants from me is my being, my heart, and my love. I do not seek His gifts, but His Person, His Holy Spirit, and His love! God presents Himself as Creator, Savior, and a personal Groom for me.

❖ O my God... As I contemplate in my conscience, I see You always looking at me... keeping Your eye on me day and night so hardly, as though there is none but me in heaven and on

¹ *Ibid* 54.

² *Orat. Against Arians, Disc, 3:19. (See our book: The Coptic Orthodox Church as a church of Erudition and Theology, 1986, p. 82-83.)*

³ *In Joan; in Rom.; PG. 59:79; 60:466.*

⁴ *In 2 Cor; 1 Tim.; PG. 61:477-480; 62:536-7.*

⁵ *In Rom.; PG. 60:477.*

earth.

- ❖ Your eyes are concentrating on the footsteps of humans. As You care for all Your whole creation. You are not depriving any of your creatures of the flood of Your love!
- ❖ You Yourself care for my footsteps and my ways day and night, watching all my paths, never forsaking me. I can say that You may probably forget heaven and earth, with all that are in and on them, concentrating Your care on me!
- ❖ You watch on me, as though you forgot the whole creation! You grant me your gifts, as though I am alone the object of your love!
- ❖ There is nothing hidden from you... my thoughts, my intentions, my actions, and my pleasures... nothing escapes your eternal care!¹

St. Augustine

c. God, the Savior is the mystery of our conquest; As long as He is with us, waters of this world would never sweep over us; and fire of lust would never burn us: ***“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; nor shall the flames scorch you.”*** (Is. 43: 2)

A magnificent portrait of the work of the Savior! He grants us His Person, so that death with all its ways cannot devour us... We carry in us our Christ “the Resurrection” (John 11: 25), so we practice the risen life, conqueror of death.

If we face the waters of the world’s love that would drown and kill the soul, and the fire of lust that would burn it, the Savior had granted us His Holy Spirit through the water of Baptism, in which we renounce the devil with all his hosts and deeds, and crush his head beneath our feet. He granted us His fiery Holy Spirit as in the day of the Pentecost, who burns the sin and abolish its fatal blaze.

It is as though the prophet Isaiah is here reminding his people of the work of God with their fathers, on their exodus from the land of Egypt. By the cross (Moses’ rod) He granted them the conquest over the Red Sea and also over the fiery serpents (by the brass serpent). God, who acted in the ancient time, acted in the second exodus from the Babylonian captivity. These two exoduses symbolize the greater exodus realized by the Savior through His cross in the life of His believers.

- ❖ Can you overcome the devil you who are unfaithful, unless you have the armor of faith, by which you can protect yourselves against his arrows? Perhaps you verify yourself while sin

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 15-18.

has overpowered your flesh, but how then do you glorify God with your body and He is the one who redeemed you with this precious blood?¹

St. Shenouda the Archimandrite

d. The Savior has paid the price. The early Church considered the blood shed on the cross, as a payment for the debt that we owe the Father, and a ransom from the hand of the devil who bought us as slaves. That is the work of the Holy Savior, to sanctify us and to set us free from his servitude. That is why He says, ***“For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place.” (Is. 43: 3)***

Egypt, with its Pharaoh, representing one of the two great powers at that time (Egypt and Assyria; then Egypt and Babylon), with its might, and Cush and Seba with their wealth, are not capable of supporting or protecting the people of God. The Lord has purchased us, not with gold or silver, but with His precious blood, to set us kings and priests. *“For You have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” (Revelation 5: 9, 10)* *“You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6: 19, 20)* *“You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.” (1 Corinthians 7: 23)* *“Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1: 18, 19)*

❖ You were purchased with the blood. You were uprooted from the empire of the body to glorify the Lord in your bodies².

Tertullian

❖ Do not assume that prices paid, differ according to wealth of people, as wealth in the Church is that in faith. As the believer owns all the world of richness, and no wonder since the believer owns the inheritance of Christ, the most precious in all the world!³

St. Ambrose

e. The Savior gives us back our glory and unity. Probably many people have despaired because of their long captivity, as far as their return to their homeland is concerned; but God the Savior comforts them saying, ***“Fear not, for I am with you. I will bring your descendants from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up,’ and to the south, ‘Do not keep them back.’ Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth - everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory, I have formed***

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 467.

² On Modesty 16

³ Ep. 63.

him, yes I have made him.” (Is. 43: 5 - 7)

In this chapter it is noticed that God speaks of Himself “I” not less than 36 times¹, so that it is called the “chapter of the divine Self,” or of the “divine I.” The same can be said of chapter 45 (31 times). What does that mean? If the sin works to focus man around his “I” to consider himself as the center of the world, to enjoy dignity and bodily lusts with pride and selfishness, yet, our Christ, on the contrary, is offering His “Self” - that is “love,” for us to acquire. When He calls us “not to be afraid,” when He calls us by our names, confirming His care wherever we are, and whatever temptations we might face; when He promises to gather us from the ends of the earth to His bosom; In all that He is seeking, not what is His, but what is ours. He offers us His company to enjoy. That is why every now and then He says, “**I am with you.**” He is ours, our eternal share. The glory and dignity of God are proclaimed in His practical and giving love, in giving His “self” to His creation.

2. YOU ARE MY WITNESSES

What does God offer us? He offers Himself as light, that opens our senses: our eyes to behold His glories in us, and His heavenly Kingdom proclaimed within us; and opens our ears to hearken His divine voice, and to comprehend His commandment. To acquire the ears of children, who recognize the voice of their Father but even His footsteps. That was what He meant by saying, “**Bring out the blind people who have eyes, and the deaf who have ears.**” (Is. 43: 8)

That is God’s role in our inner life, renewing our nature in the water of Baptism by His Holy Spirit, to grant us the new man, capable of enjoying the divine fellowship.

Through that experience we, the Church, testify to others, calling to a collective assembly of nations (Is. 43: 9 - 13), to get them to know the Savior, and to confirm the realization of what He had foretold and promised through His prophets, along the ages before His coming:

“Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled who among them can declare this, and show us former things. Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear and say, ‘It is truth.’ ‘You are My witnesses,’ says the Lord, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no Savior.’” (Is. 43: 9 - 11)

God requests from those who enjoyed the new insight and the new spiritual ears, to assemble nations and peoples, to enter with them into a practical debate according to what they have experienced in life, through which they are to proclaim the following:

a. To ask if they have, prior clear and definite prophecies concerning what the future holds (Is. 41: 22). As for us, we have got prophecies, not about the conquests of Cush over

¹ Bultmore, ch. 43.

Babylon, to save the ancient people of God, but about the Messiah, the Chosen Servant. We have got prophecies concerning His Person, His works, and His message. We knew that He is to be born from a virgin, when and where would be His birth; His works among His people; and His offering Himself as a unique sacrifice of love etc. What the prophets uttered, have been through the unique eternal Lord, before and after whom there was, and will never be another God, as He says, **“I am the First and I am the Last.” (Is. 44: 6)**

St. John Chrysostom believes that, although the devil is capable of performing miracles [Yet prophecies are special works of God, that the devil cannot imitate, although struggling strongly to do¹.]

God, with His love for humanity, has granted prophets these prophecies, has spoken through the mouths of His saintly men, and inspired the divine word; and is still working to grant us the comprehension of these divine mysteries. According to **St. Irenaeus**: [It is impossible for us - without God - to get to know God, who instructs men through His Word².]

b. Beside the prophecy concerning the coming of the Savior, the Holy Bible confirms that God alone is the Savior. **“I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from Me there is no Savior.” (Is 43: 11)** God the Creator, with love for His beloved creature, does not entrust his salvation to anybody else, but personally cares for him, and gives His life for him: *“The good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”* (John 10: 11) He is the One who created, and He is the One who renews and saves His creation!

In repeating His saying **“I, even I, am the Lord,”** is a confirmation that the Lord Himself, the First and the Last, is the One who gives salvation, proclaiming His divine love through His redeeming work.

- ❖ In being the “Life” He died to give us life; and in being the “Word,” He became flesh, to the flesh in the Word³.
- ❖ He is the Word of God, His power and His wisdom, as testified by King Solomon (Wisdom 7: 27)⁴.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

3. THE FALL OF BABYLON

God, who allowed the chastise of His people by the Babylonian captivity, now, because of His love for them, He allows for the fall of Babylon. He speaks in the past tense (the Arabic

¹ In John hom 19:2.

² Adv. Haer. 4:5:1.

³ Fr. M.F. Wahba: *The Doctrine of Sanctification in St. Athanasius' Paschal letters*, 1988, p.77; p. 543; cf *De Inc. 1:4* ;p. 36: 20:1, p. 47 ; *Con. Gen. 1:5*, p. 4.

⁴ Fr. M.F. Wahba: *The Doctrine of Sanctification in St. Athanasius' Paschal letters*, 1988, p. 528, 506.

version) as a confirmation to His listeners that what is going to happen is an inevitable fact.

The text varies from one version to the other, yet with the same meaning: ***“Thus says the Lord - your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, ‘for your sake, I will send to Babylon and bring them all down as fugitives - the Chaldeans who rejoice in their ships.’” (Is. 43: 14)***

Here, God appears as a Leader of the armies of Medes and Persia invading Babylon that drove the Babylonians to flee in terror. Many of the noble elite (in Hebrew the word is “*barichim*” that is “nobles”) escaped to their ships in which they used to rejoice - as Babylon had no ships of war; and when they found out that their ships could not protect them, their rejoice turned into screams and bitterness.

In Is. 43: 15 God was called by several titles: “the Lord,” “your Holy One,” “Creator of Israel,” and “the King;” through which His role as the leader of His people and Church is revealed. He is God the King, the unchangeable in His love and power, who is capable of granting conquest over the evil one. He is the Savior, who in His love offers the unique sacrifice of salvation; and He is the Holy One, who renews the creation of His believers, and sanctifies them to reign eternally with Him.

He probably meant through these titles, that salvation and sanctification are specific work of God, who loves His weak creation, and yearns for renewing it in Him.

4. A NEW EXODUS

God who is saving His people, had previously granted them salvation on the hands of Moses, to set them free from the servitude of Pharaoh; Now He is bringing them out of the Babylonian captivity, as though in a new exodus. He keeps on setting them free from the captivity of sin, to the freedom of glory of God’s children; from the deeds of the old man, to the continuous enjoyment of the deeds of the new inner man.

“Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, and a path through the mighty waters, who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power. They shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick.” (Is. 43: 16. 17)

He saved them from the authority of Pharaoh, through their crossing the Red Sea, abolishing any possibility for Pharaoh to regain anew His authority over them. He likens the sudden and quick devastation of Pharaoh, to a wick that was extinguished for good. With the same power, God saves them again from the authority of Babylon.

That salvation, realized against Pharaoh and then against Babylon, should likewise be realized against the deeds of the old man (Colossians 3: 9); thus the prophet goes on to say, ***“Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do new thing. Now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.” (Is. 43: 18, 19)***

He does not only want us to take off the old man with his deeds, but to forget him altogether, and to stop dwelling on the past, to spare ourselves any despair. He persuades us to get preoccupied with the new life that is growing in us. He is making a way in the desert, and streams in the wasteland; this way is nothing but the Lord Christ Himself, who says, “*I am the Way*” (John 14: 6), that was set up in us, we the barren desert, and dwelt in our hearts, to let us enter His kingdom. And these streams are the fountains of the Holy Spirit springing in us, we the wild uninhabited wilderness; to turn our desolate heart into a dwelling place for the Holy God! It is as though the mystery of our renewal is the dwelling of the Lord Christ and His Holy Spirit in our depths¹.

God confirms the opening of the door of faith before the Gentiles, to acquire a new people, that know the inner joy and praise, saying, “*The beast in the field will honor Me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, I give drink to My people, My chosen. This people I have formed for Myself. They shall declare My praise.*” (Is. 43: 20, 21)

He likens the Gentiles to the wild animals that live in the desert, because of what was known of their fierce and violent nature; because they lived as though in a wilderness, with no promises, covenants, or divine law; and because of their idiotic worship of idols and the evil practices of their religions. Those nations, known for violence and idiocy, who used to live in wild deserts, started to enjoy streams of the Holy Spirit, to drink and quench their thirst; and through receiving fellowship in the chosen people of God, their nature will change through the work of the Holy Trinity in them, their hearts will open up to joy, and their tongues to praise.

How beautiful is the divine expression: “*The people I formed for Myself!*” (Is. 43: 21) We became His, God’s portion, as He also became our portion!

5. SALVATION IS A FREE GIFT

God offers His works of salvation as a free gift to humanity. Yet there were certain obstacles that hindered God’s plans with the old people, who rejected faith in the Savior. These obstacles were:

a. No prayers: “*But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob, and you have been weary of Me, O Israel.*” (Is. 43: 22)

Praying is the mystery of our enjoyment of the works of God. And as **Martyrus** says, [Prayer does whatever it likes, as God could do! It gives orders on earth to have its effect in heaven².]

¹ الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، ص 13.

² *Book of Perfection*, 40.

b. Disregard of God even in little things: ***“You have not brought Me sheep for your burnt offerings, nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not caused you to serve with grain offerings, nor wearied you with incense. You have not bought Me no sweet cane with money, nor have you satisfied Me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened Me with your sins; you have wearied Me with your iniquities.”*** Is. 43: 23, 24)

When God brought His people out of the land of Egypt, He was in no need for their offerings or their animal sacrifices, but He was seeking their hearts, yearning to embrace them as His own people. The sacrifices were symbols of that of Christ, and a sign of love for Him. He was expecting them to offer their hearts together with their burnt offerings, their sacrifices, and their incense, etc.

- ❖ He draws their attention to the fact that He brought them out of the land of Egypt, not to offer Him sacrifices, but to let them forsake idol worship of the Egyptians, and to listen to the voice of the Lord, who was to them, salvation and glory (Jeremiah 7: 21)¹.

St. Irenaeus

c. Preoccupation with carnal lusts and worldly interests: ***“But you have burdened Me with your sins, and wearied Me with your iniquities.”*** (Is. 43: 24)

Instead of honoring God by presenting their hearts as burnt offerings in their worship, people deviated to selfishness and preoccupation with worldly interests, misusing God’s love, care, and gifts for the sake of their own selves.

We often misuse God’s gifts, like emotions and motivations, and use them, not for the sake of the kingdom of God, and edification of the congregation, but for practicing evil.

Despite all that evil, God remains waiting for our repentance and confession of our transgressions, to grant us forgiveness, because of His Holy Name and His exalted love, confirming to us: ***“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Put Me in remembrance. Let us contend together. State your case, that you may be acquitted.”*** (Is. 43: 25, 26)

- ❖ The way of repentance starts with our condemnation of transgressions².
- ❖ He requests this (confession of our sins), to concentrate more our love for Him³.
- ❖ Whoever practices repentance after committing sin, deserves, not commendation, but congratulation, having crossed over to the place of the righteous⁴.

¹ *Adv. Haer 4:17:3.*

² *Resisting the Temptation of the Devil, hom 2,6.*

³ *Letters to the Fallen Theodore. 1:15.*

⁴ *In 1 Cor. Hom. 11.*

- ❖ Do not let anything confuse you, but exalt yourself up to heaven itself. Give a bitter thigh and present a sacrifice of confession; as it is said: **“First state your transgressions to be acquitted.” (Is. 43: 26 LXX)** Offer a sacrifice of contrite heart; such sacrifices do not turn into ashes and smoke, and never vanish into air. They need no wood nor fire, but a repentant heart, the fuel that burns, yet does not consume; whoever prays fervently burns, but do not get consumed, but turns into gold with more splendor¹.

St. John Chrysostom

Thus, it is fitting for us to confess our sins, to have them forgiven, and then we should always recall the work of God to us, and glorify Him, instead of dwelling on our transgressions.

- ❖ How can we forget about the evil approaching us? By recalling goodness and by thinking of God. For if we always think of God, we shall not recall these matters².

St. John Chrysostom

We should not be ashamed to confess our sins; for our forefathers have also sinned, starting from the first Adam. **“Your first father sinned, and your mediators have transgressed against Me.”(Is. 43: 27)**

By “mediators,” is meant, according to Fathers of the Church and Jewish scholars, all humanity represented by Adam our forefather. Yet others interpret it in the light of what came in Ezekiel 16: 3 “Your father was an Amorite.” While others believe it to be Orijah, the high priest, who led the people to idol worship, in the days of Ahaz (2 Kings 16: 10 - 16); and still others believe it to represent the kings and high priests, namely the civil and religious leaders, all of whom led the people to rebel.

The fruit of sins and rebellion is ‘curse’ and loss of dignity, as it is said, **“I will give Jacob to the curse and Israel to reproaches.” (Is. 43: 28)**

¹ In 2 Cor. Hom 5.

² In Heb. Hom 14:7.

CHAPTER 44

POURING OUT OF THE SPIRIT AND THE NEW LIFE

This chapter is considered a continuation of the previous one, in which God proclaims the realization of our salvation, through pouring His Holy Spirit on His Church. It is for the sake of her continuous renewal, setting in her witnesses to His work in them; fulfilling, sanctifying and forgiving their sins, in place of the inner void they used to suffer during their idol worship.

The salvation that God presents to His people carries two sides: a confirmation that our satisfaction is in God, and that separating ourselves from Him is ridicule and deceit of heart.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Pouring out of the Spirit | 1-5. |
| 2. You are My witnesses | 6-8. |
| 3. Idolatry and the void | 9-20. |
| 4. You are Mine | 21-26. |
| 5. A prophecy about Cyrus | 27-28. |

1. POURING OUT OF THE SPIRIT

God realizes His call and choice of the new Israel through pouring out His Holy Spirit on the believers, to establish the Church of the New Testament, saying,

“Yet hear now, O Jacob, My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen. Thus says the Lord who made you, and formed you from the womb, who will help you: ‘Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on him, who is thirsty, and flood on the dry ground. I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring. They will spring up among the grass like willows by the water courses.’ One will say, ‘I am the Lord’s;’ another will call himself by the name of Jacob; another will write on his hand, ‘The Lord’s,’ and name himself by the name of Israel.” (Is. 44: 1-5)

In this great gift, it is to be noticed:

a. God yearns to grant man, not only His outer blessings and gifts, but also His own self: *“I will pour out My Spirit on your descendants and My blessings on your offspring.”* He grants the Grantor of gifts and blessings, as a gift.

❖ Whoever gets washed for salvation, will receive the water and the Holy Spirit.

Origen¹

- ❖ The baptized, will get the Holy Spirit in him, and will actually carry the name “the Temple of God².”

St. Cyril the Great

- ❖ O, Lord, who gave us His Spirit in Baptism, give me the words, by which I praise You with love.
- ❖ The Only-Begotten Son has descended, hauled you up from garbage, granted you His Spirit by Baptism, and made you His brother.
- ❖ In the water we were naturalized with His Deity, to become truly children; and since then, we gained the right to call God “Our Father.” This Hidden One who gave us His spirit through baptism.

Mar Jacob El-Serougi³

God considers this gift the greatest of all, as He, with His love, created us, and from the womb helped us. Now, He requests from us not to be afraid because He has chosen us, and to realize that choice, He granted us this gift.

b. He calls His Church “*Jeshurun*,” a name that came four times in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32: 15; 33: 5, 6), meaning ‘straight,’ after ‘Jasher;’ as though He is calling His Church, that included the sinners, ‘straight,’ through the work of His Holy Spirit. He is encouraging His people to respond to the gift of His Holy Spirit, forsake their deviations and rebellions, and to praise God for His splendor and spiritual beauty.

In the book of the Song of Songs, while the Church is admitting that temptations have tanned her (Songs 1: 6), yet God, the true Groom, did not ever hint to any blame in her. “*Behold, you are fair, My love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove’s eyes.*” (Songs 1: 15) “*You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you.*” (Songs 4: 7)

The Lord Christ sees in His Church absolute beauty, whose mystery lies in the ‘dove’s eyes;’ the Holy Spirit who descended on her, and appeared in the likeness of a dove, granted her spiritual enlightenment. **Origen** says, [Her eyes are compared to two doves, as it became now capable of understanding the Holy Scripture according to the Spirit and not to the letter. She can comprehend the spiritual mysteries in the Holy Bibles, as the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. When we understand the Law and prophets according to the Spirit, we acquire dove eyes. That is why, in the Book of Psalms, her soul longed to have the wings of a dove (Psalm 68: 14), with the

¹ In *Zek. Hom* 6:5.

² In *Joan* 5:2.

³ ميمر عن المعمودية.

hope that it can fly up to the understanding of spiritual mysteries, and settle in the dwelling places of wisdom¹.] **St. Gregory of Nyssa** believes that the mystery of the Church's beauty lies in her dove's eyes, in whose purity the image of the Holy Spirit appears, for the bride to concentrate her eyes permanently on Him, thus His image will be printed on them.

St. Jerome believes that the mystery of the Church's beauty is her union with the Only-Begotten Son of God, to carry His glory in her, saying, [what is more beautiful than the soul, called the daughter of God (Psalm 45: 10), who does not seek the outward beauty (1 Peter 3: 3)? She believes in Christ; and granted His Spirit. She walks, with great hope, her way toward Him, who is her Groom and Lord at the same time².]

c. He is granting us the gift of His Holy Spirit, who works in us according to our need. To him who is thirsty, He gives water to quench his thirst. But on him who is like a dry land, He will pour flood, to turn his dryness into a paradise. He is generous in His giving, granting us according to our needs, and to our response to Him. "*Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.*" (Psalm 81: 10)

❖ The flame introduced by the Holy Spirit in us, we can, if we wish, make it flare more and more. While if we do not, we shall lose it altogether, through our negligence and poor response³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Whoever gets the Holy Spirit, enjoys Him according to his capacity, and not to the Spirit's capability⁴.

St. Basil the Great

❖ You will be provided with battle gears to use against the power of the enemy (the devil)... The weapon is ready: "*the sword of the Spirit.*" (Ephesians 6: 17) It is fitting for you to stretch your right hand properly to hold it, to fight the battle of the Lord, to overcome the adversary forces, and to become a (fortress), fortified against the heretics.

❖ Do not despise the grace because it is free, but receive and treasure it with piety.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem⁵

d. What does He mean by: "*spring up like grass... like willows by the watercourses*"? He probably means, that whoever enjoys the gift of the Holy Spirit, will spring up like a huge tree

¹ *Comm. On Cant. 3:1.*

² *Ep. To Furia 54.*

³ *In Matt. PG. 57:99,80..*

⁴ *On the Holy Spirit 9:22.*

⁵ *Cat. Lect: Pref., 1:4.*

amid perishable grass.

e. Whoever enjoys the Spirit writes on his hand **“I belong to the Lord;”** as it was the old custom for man to have the name of his God or master tattooed on his hand. That custom was however prohibited by God, because in case someone happens to inscribe the name of an idol on his hand, if he chooses to forsake it, it would be difficult to have it removed.

“And called by the name of Israel;” as the Church of the New Testament, who enjoyed the gift of the Holy Spirit, carried the title “the New Israel.” She inherits from the Old Israel the Holy Scripture with the divine law, the commandments, the prophecies, the covenants, and the promises; understanding all that according to the Spirit, and not to the letter, comprehending divine mysteries, and enjoying exalted things.

2. YOU ARE MY WITNESSES

The Speaker here is the Lord Christ, the “rock” that flooded water on the people (I Corinthians 10: 4). That is why He says, **“I will pour water on the thirsty” (Is 44: 3);** and calls Himself, **“King of Israel”** and **“Redeemer” (Is. 44: 6).** He previously stated before Pilate that He is a King.

Here He calls Himself, **“The Lord of hosts;” “I am the First; and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.” (Is. 44: 6)** In the Book of Revelations, the Lord Christ says, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega” (Revelations 1: 8).** **“I am the First and the Last; the Beginning and the End.” (Revelations 1: 17; 22: 13)**

It is obvious that the Redeemer, the Lord Almighty, and the only God, is Himself the Lord Christ the Savior. This is the testimony of those who enjoy His salvation: **“You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me?” (Is. 44: 8)**

What we enjoy in the New Testament is an extension of the continuous work of God; God who worked with the ancient people (Is. 44: 7); who had proclaimed the future to them, namely what He planned for the New Testament (Is. 44: 7).

He probably presented Himself as **“The First and the Last,”** to proclaim that He, who had worked in the Old Testament, is Himself who is still working in the New Testament.

God the Savior is the First and the Last, preceding His flock to lead them, and following behind to attend to any sheep, slow or weak. He embraces all and compassionate to all. He is also the First, being the Head of the Church, and the Last having become a Servant to all. He is the First and Last in our life, fulfilling all our needs.

3. IDOLATRY AND THE VOID

Having spoken about the gift of the great Spirit that presented us, as witnesses to the Truth, He proclaims our enjoyment of God our Savior, as the Lord of hosts; the Leader of the spiritual battle; the fulfiller of all, being the First and the Last; and the support of people of the

Old Testament, as well as the believers of the New Testament. He is now comparing between the testimony of believers and that of the idol worshippers:

a. Testimony to the Savior provides satisfaction, quenching to thirst and fruitfulness. ***“For I will pour on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground... They will spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses.”***(Is. 44: 3, 4) Testimony to idols, on the other hand, provides nothing but vanity, void, hunger, blindness and ignorance. ***“Those who make graven image, all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit. They are their own witnesses. They neither see nor know”*** (Is. 44: 9)

Our Christ is a fulfiller of the depths. Those who experienced Him did not need a thing, while outside Him, there would be a loss of every inner satisfaction, and a denial of fellowship with God, the source of life and satisfaction.

b. Testimony to the Savior grants peace: ***“Do not fear, nor be afraid.”*** (Is. 44: 2, 8) While outside Him, there would be fear and trembling. ***“Let them be all gathered together, let them stand up. Yet they shall fear, they shall be ashamed together.”*** (Is. 44: 11) All forces came together against Christ: high priests, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Roman governors etc. Yet they harbored terror and fear, even in the time of crucifying and mocking Him! Terrified by their inner evil, and lack of divine grace in their hearts. Nature itself rebelled against them: the sun and moon eclipsed, the earth quaked, the rocks split, the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

c. Witnesses to the Lord enjoy dignity, and are counted as “the New Israel,” and inscribe the name of the Savior on their inner hands, as though they do nothing except in His name (Is. 44: 5), while witnesses to others, outside of Him, carry shame and infamy (Is. 44).

He presents to us a demonstrative portrait of the corruption of pagan worship, revealing that idols together with their makers and worshippers all carry shame and emptiness. The Blacksmiths take their work (of idols) very seriously, not caring for any sensation of hunger, thirst or weariness (Is. 44: 12), for the sake of forging hammers and plates of iron to make statues. The carpenters, likewise, do the same to shape wooden forms. They all labor nonstop to create mute metal and wooden statues, incapable of giving salvation, while the children of God are negligent in their spiritual strife, despite their enjoyment of divine possibilities for eternal salvation. Those laboring in vain are actually judging the negligent children of God. And as said by Jesus the Lord of Glory, ***“The sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.”*** (Luke 16: 8)

Finally, what does idol worshipping (or separation from God) offer?

a. **Insight blindness and inner darkness** (Is. 44: 18), while Christ is the sun of righteousness (Malachi 4: 2).

- b. **Ignorance and lack of knowledge** (Is. 44: 19), while Christ is our righteousness.
- c. Because of hunger, man **feeds on ashes** (Is. 44: 20), while Christ is the heavenly bread.
- d. **Misleading and deceit** (Is. 44: 20), while Christ is the Way and the Truth.

In other words, we find in our Christ inner enlightenment, knowledge, satisfaction, truth, and all our needs, while outside of Him there is nothing but inner void, feeling of isolation and loss of inner insight.

4. YOU ARE MINE

He demonstrated the vanity of idol worshipping, or separation from God, not just for the sake of mere intellectual criticism, but to move the soul, and to motivate it to receive the divine work of salvation, that concentrates on the following:

- a. Setting a people of God: **“Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant.” (Is. 44: 21)** We became the new Israel, worshipping God.
- b. Referred to God: **“You are Mine.” (Is. 44: 21)** We are not only His creation and people, but God finds pleasure in us as His children, attributed to Him.
- c. Not forgotten by Him (Is. 44: 21).
- d. Enjoying forgiveness of sins, regardless of their extent: **“I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions... Return to Me for I have redeemed you” (Is. 44: 22)**
- e. He grants the soul (heavens) a praise, the flesh (earth) a shout of joy, and the energy (mountains) burst of songs; all what is inside us become like trees glorifying God (Is. 44: 23).

5. A PROPHECY ABOUT CYRUS

What would be accomplished by the hand of the pagan king Cyrus for the sake of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple God proclaimed about 220 years beforehand. **“Who says to Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure,’ even saying to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be built,’ and to the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’” (Is. 44: 28)**

Here, for the first time, He mentions the name Cyrus, meaning ‘sun’ in Persia, and ‘shepherd’ in Aramite; The name ‘shepherd’ is considered by some, as a title of kings of the Middle East in those days¹.

The Jewish Historian Josephus says that when Cyrus read his name in the book of Isaiah, 220 years before his time, he decided to realize what was written about him (see Ezra 1: 1, 2; 2 Chronicles 36: 23).

What Does He mean by saying, **“Who says to the deep, ‘Be dry, and I will dry up your rivers’?” (Is. 44: 27)**

- a. He is portraying Jerusalem as a watery deep, and a stream, over which, according to

¹ R.N. Whybray: *The New Century Bible Comm., Isaiah 40-46*, p. 104.

human mind, the temple could not be rebuilt. Although the Jews have completely lost hope after so long in captivity the Almighty and caring God will dry up the waters and streams to realize His promises to us.

b. He is probably referring here to the crossing of the Red Sea and the River Jordan to confirm that He is capable of letting His people cross from captivity back to their land of promise.

c. Or He is probably referring to Cyrus who crossed the River Euphrates to invade Babylon.

2
**CYRUS' ATTACK ON BABYLON, AND
ITS DESOLATION**

ISAIAH 45-47

CHAPTER 45

CYRUS AND THE SALVATION

The previous chapters (40 to 44) are considered an invitation to the Church to find comfort in God her Savior; for in Him alone she will find her satisfaction. Now, through chapters 45 to 47 God is proclaiming the Source of her comfort, which is the destruction of evil opposing her. He called Cyrus 'His shepherd' (Is. 44: 28), almost two centuries before his attack on Babylon, in his capacity as an instrument of God to destroy those who humiliated His people, and to help them getting back to their land.

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|--|---------------|
| 1. A divine talk to Cyrus | 1-8. |
| 2. A protest against choosing Cyrus | 8-13. |
| 3. God, the hidden Savior | 14-19. |
| 4. A call for salvation in Christ | 20-25. |

1. A DIVINE TALK TO CYRUS

From Babylonian writings, it is stated that Cyrus was a son of Quambiz and a grandson of another Cyrus; all of them reigned east of Elam, the capital of their kingdom was Shushan, since around the year 550 B.C.¹

Cyrus, considered as the founder of the Persian kingdom, started his military career as a leader of a not too important squadron in Persia, then managed to become the leader of two mountain squadrons. Being very ambitious he used his troops to invade small neighboring kingdoms. He was ridiculed by Babylon, that he overcome in the year 539 B.C. in the reign of Belshazzar its king, through which the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 5: 28) was realized. Daniel has also been in the royal court of Cyrus (Daniel 6: 28).

Herodotus and Zynophon (a Greek youth) commended the person of Cyrus, the latter spoke of him 100 years after his death as a role model of strength combined with simplicity, purity and self-control.

Now, God is addressing Cyrus two centuries prior to his appearance on the stage of events, proclaiming His divine view of him, and God's aim and plans through him. In that talk it is noticed:

a. The word "I" appears 16 times in God's talk to Cyrus (Is. 45: 1 to 7), and 31 times in the chapter as a whole. It is as though God wants to confirm that setting Cyrus has been according to a divine plan, and that his conquest and devastation of Babylon, as though of a

¹ قاموس الكتاب المقدس، ص 795-796.

ceramic pot, is something from God Himself.

b. God calls Cyrus **“His anointed”** (Is. 45: 1), although He does not know God (Is, 45: 4, 5). That was probably because he worshipped an anonymous One God, although he respected religions as a whole; or probably because he was the means for realizing God’s plan for saving His people from Babylonian captivity; and for he was a symbol of the Lord Christ, Savior of the world.

c. As far as God’s work through him, He says, **“Whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him, and loose the armor of kings.”** (Is. 45: 1) God, as a Father, takes hold of Cyrus’ right hand, as though of a child, directing and supporting him to destroy evil. He granted him conquest over nations to subdue them. As it was the custom for a conqueror to place his foot on the neck of the defeated leader, and to strip the kings of their very precious armor, a sign of stripping them of their strength and greatness. That was literally realized when king Belshazzar saw a human handwriting over the wall of his palace, *“His countenance changed, his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other”* (Daniel 5: 6).

Cyrus was a symbol of the Lord Christ, to whom it is said: *“The Lord is at your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath.”* (Psalm 110: 5) Now it is said of Cyrus, that God takes hold of his right hand, while it is said of the Son, the Word, *“The Lord is at your right hand.”* It is to be noticed that, in the same Psalm, God the Father says to the Son, *“Sit at My right hand”* (Psalm 110: 1); as though the Son is at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110: 1), and at the same time, the Father is at the right hand of the Son (Psalm 110: 5). The word *“right hand”* here does not indicate a location or a direction, but is a symbol of divine authority, and of unity, as they are one in Deity and in power.

As Cyrus destroyed kings, the Lord Christ destroyed those kings, who denied and opposed the Truth, as is said: *“He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath.”* (Psalm 110: 5)

St. Augustine comments on this, saying, [those kings were wounded by His glory, and became weak by the impact of His name, deprived of any strength to realize what they intended to do... They aimed to abolish the Christian name from the face of the world, but they failed... Kings fell on that rock, to be wounded and broken, as they said: “Who is Christ?”¹]

He probably meant by kings, *“Christ’s own who did not receive Him”* (John 1: 11). They should have united with Him as the King of kings, to become kings and witnesses to Him; something that amazed the prophets, to make Isaiah say, *“Truly You are a God who hides Himself, O God and Savior of Israel,”* and likewise amazed the apostle Paul (Romans 10: 20; 11:

¹ On Ps. 110.

7; 9: 30)¹.

d. ***“To open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut.” (Is. 45: 1)*** God precedes Cyrus, His anointed, to open closed doors before him, and to destroy castles fortified by men. Even nature will move to support him, ***“I will go before you and will level the mountains, and make the crooked places straight. I will break in pieces the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron.” (Is. 45: 2)***

When we unite with our victorious Christ, we walk along the royal way, and rise toward the heavenlies without hindrance, as it is God who precedes us to open the doors. Cyrus knocked down the walls of Babylon with all its 100 huge bronze gates, according to Herodotus.

e. God granted Cyrus the hidden treasures of Babylon, as it was the custom of kings to hide their treasures in secret places to protect them from enemies. ***“I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I am the Lord, who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel.” (Is. 45: 3)*** As far as God is *“the former of light”* (Is. 45: 7) He reveals to His children the hidden things, and grants them the treasures of His incomprehensible grace.

f. God reveals to Cyrus what He expects from him. ***“For Jacob my servant, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by name... though you have not known Me.” (Is. 45: 4)*** What He is offering him is for the sake of His believers and people. Thus it is fitting for us, as the anointed of the Lord, who got attached to our Lord Jesus Christ, to recognize our mission, that is the edification and growth of the congregation in the Lord.

g. As the Persian religions have been known for believing in two gods: one of good and one of evil, God wanted to take away that thought from Cyrus, saying to him, ***“I am the Lord, and there is no other, I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity. I, the Lord, do all these things.” (Is. 45: 6, 7)***

The word “calamity (*ra*),” does not mean ‘evil,’ but the fruit of evil or its consequences of sorrow and affliction. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [There is evil, that is truly evil, like adulatory, greed, and several others hidden and countless, that deserve severe rebuke and punishment. And there is evil, that is not real evil, but so called because of its consequences, like famine, death, illness, etc. These so called evil, if they are real evil, they could not turn into sources of good to us, as chastising our pride and negligence, and leading us to more alertness².] With the same sense, **Abbot Theodore**, in the Conferences of **St. John Cassian**, says, [The Holy Bible uses the two terms “evil” and “sorrows,” calling them evil, in the sense that they are thought to be evil, by

¹ St. Chrysostom: In John hom 9:1.

² That Demons do not govern the World, hom 1:15.

those to whom they did not bring good¹.]

2. A PROTEST AGAINST CHOOSING CYRUS

It seems that a murmur has been created among the Jews as well as among the Gentiles. The Jews protested against God, because He realized salvation through a pagan person; as choosing him breaks their national pride. As for the Gentiles, on the other hand, they got bitter, that one of their own should carry out that role, to bring salvation to the Jews from captivity, and to help restoring the worship rites in Jerusalem.

Before that situation, Isaiah lifted up his heart to God, to present a liturgical prayer, by which he proclaims that what occurs through Cyrus is a symbol of what is to occur through the Lord Christ. As though he is asking the Jews as well as the Gentiles to forsake their murmur, and to practice the free salvation offered to all. That was what made Isaiah turn in his talk, from Cyrus to Christ our righteousness and salvation, saying,

“Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation. And let righteousness spring up together. I, the Lord have created it.” (Is. 45: 8)

As though he is quoting the Psalm saying, *“Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven...”* (Psalm 85: 9 - 13) *“Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God shall bless us.”* (Psalm 67: 6) *“The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness”* (Psalm 72: 3)

The prophet is confirming that salvation is realized, not because of Cyrus, but through the salvation and righteousness of the Lord Christ. In Him our peace is realized through the meeting together of mercy and truth, or of mercy and divine justice; as, on the Cross, the price was completely paid, through His infinite righteousness.

St. Augustine² believes that in Christ, Jews met with the Gentiles, through the meeting together of truth and mercy. The Jews knew the truth through the Law and prophecies; and the Gentiles received mercy, having forsaken their pagan worship. Those have met these as one people, righteous and sanctified for the Lord.

In the Lord Christ, heaven has met with the earth, as the heavenly Son of God, became a Son of man, born as a human on our earth. That is why the prophet says, ***“Rain down you heavens above, and let the skies pour down righteousness” (Is. 45: 8)***; as though he is saying *“He bowed the heaven and came down.”* (Psalm 18: 9) The Holy righteous One came down to

¹ Conf. 6:6.

² On Ps.85.

realize our salvation. As to saying, **“Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together” (Is. 45: 8)**, he means, *“Truth shall spring out of the earth.”* (Psalm 85)

St. Augustine says, [Christ was born by a woman; the Son of God became flesh. What is Truth? It is God! What is earth? It is the flesh... But Truth that sprang out of the earth has been there before the earth. He created the heaven and earth. But for righteousness to look down from heaven, that is to say, for humans to be justified through divine grace, Truth has been born by the Virgin Mary, to be able to offer a sacrifice to justify them, the sacrifice of suffering, the sacrifice of the cross¹.]

Having taken our sight away from Cyrus, and turned it to Christ the Savior, through His unique sacrifice, that is capable of justification, the prophet blamed both the Jews and the Gentiles for their protest against the Lord, presenting two woes:

a. **The first woe:** The ‘potsherd’ quarrels with the ‘potter,’ and the clay with its maker; the potsherd has no right to request a certain form from its maker, as saying to him, for example: **“Your work has no hands...” (Is. 45: 9)**, that is you have done the clay with no hands.

b. The second woe: The protest of a child against his father or his mother, saying, “What have you begotten?” I wish you had begotten me an angel, and not a man who carries human weakness, and suffers beneath the heavy burdens and troubles of earthly life. As potsherd and children, we should thank our maker, and not protest against Him.

3. GOD THE HIDDEN SAVIOR

The Jews as well as the Gentiles preoccupied themselves with the episode of Cyrus in its literality, although it was fitting for all of them to penetrate the letter to meet with God, hidden and working beyond history for the salvation of all. In a fatherly rebuke God says, **“Ask Me of the things to come concerning My sons, and concerning the work of My hands, you command Me” (Is. 45: 11)**

I wish you would only preoccupy yourselves with the eternal future, namely to seek the kingdom and righteousness of God, then all other things would be added to you. Pray for the sake of His children, for His believers and the works of His hands. We should realize how much we mean to Him. In other words, you should preoccupy yourselves with your eternal kingdom, your testimony to others, and your longing for the salvation of every man; all of which are far more important than protesting against giving Cyrus that role in the salvation from Babylonian captivity.

Once more, He confirms to them that they should not be preoccupied with Cyrus, but with Him, **“God who hides Himself, God and Savior of Israel” (Is. 45: 15)**, who works in secrecy.

¹ *Ibid.*

The features of this divine salvation are:

a. A free salvation: ***“I have raised him (Cyrus) in My righteousness; and I will direct all his ways. He shall build My city, and let My exiles go free; not for price nor reward, says the Lord of hosts.” (Is. 45: 13)***

Cyrus has realized God’s plan for His people, without expecting any reward. The people did not repay him for paving the ways for them, for rebuilding their city, nor for setting them free of captivity. That was a symbol of the free salvation of the Lord Christ, according to the words of the apostle Paul, *“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.” (Romans. 3: 24, 25)*

b. A collective salvation: To bring the Egyptians, the Cushites, and the Sebaeans, to faith, to let them enter the new Israel, with the spirit of humiliation and worship (Is. 45: 14). Our Lord Christ stretched His two hands on the cross, to embrace by one hand the ancient people, and by the other those of the Gentiles; He embraced the entire world, to raise humanity to the adoption to the Father by His Holy Spirit.

c. An everlasting salvation: ***“But Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced, forever and ever.” (Is. 45: 17)***

d. An openly declared salvation: ***“I have not spoken in secret; in a dark place of the earth.” (Is. 45: 19)*** The Lord of glory was crucified openly on the Mount of Golgotha.

4. A CALL FOR SALVATION IN CHRIST

The Lord Christ calls the Gentiles to enjoy Him as a Savior, capable of justifying them: ***“Assemble yourselves and come. Draw near together, you who have escaped from the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god that cannot save. Tell and bring forth your case. Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me. There is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be save, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself. The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, ‘Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength, to Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him. In the Lord all descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.’” (Is. 45: 20-25)***

In this call, the following are to be noticed:

a. A collective invitation, requesting from nations to gather together as one holy Church, approaching with the Spirit of a congregation to receive His redeeming work.

b. God is the Savior, and nobody else, and as said by the apostle Paul: “*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 more salvation perfect through sufferings.*” (Hebrews 2: 10)

And as said by **St. Athanasius the Apostolic**: [By these words he means, that it was not for anybody else to let humans forsake evil, but for the Word of God, who made them from the beginning... Because, by the sacrifice of His body, He put an end to the verdict against us, as it has been through a man that death came upon all humans, so also by the Word of God, who became Man death was abolished and the resurrection of life was initiated¹.]

c. A call filled with hope that realizes its goal, that to Him every knee will bow.

d. A call based on faith, “**Look to Me**” (Is. 45: 22); as did the ancient people, when they looked to the brass serpent and got cured.

e. Enjoyment of the righteousness and strength of the Savior.

f. The Savior is the Source of the glory of His believers, and the shame of those who oppose Him.

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 233-234.

CHAPTER 46

GOD, BEARER OF OUR BURDENS

God, allowed His people to go into Babylonian captivity He Himself set them free by Cyrus, proclaiming His care for His children, carrying their burdens and troubles. There is nothing heavier than our life with our sins, yet He carries it for us through His redemptive work on the cross.

In a magnificent analogy, the prophet reveals the difference between life in Christ and outside Him. In Him, Christ carries us as if by wings of the Spirit, but outside Him, we become like pagans whose gods need to be carried and for someone to stand watch over them.

1. God, bearer of our burdens 1-7.

2. Calling Cyrus from the East 8-13.

1. GOD, BEARER OF OUR BURDENS

God compares Himself with the gods of Babylon, who need someone to carry them, while He carries our life with all its burdens, saying, *“Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle. Your carriages were heavily loaded, a burden to the weary beast. They stoop; they bow down together. They could not deliver the burden, but have themselves gone into captivity.”* (Is. 46: 1)

The two principal gods of Babylon stooped low before Cyrus, bowed down to him. The worshipped turned into slaves, to be helplessly carried, with all their idols over beasts, all are incapable of walking, even of moving. The men of Cyrus robbed all jewelries adorning them. All were taken into captivity. Are these gods, which are incapable of rescuing themselves, able to help anyone else?

Bel: an Acadian name, like Baal in Hebrew, meaning ‘master,’ was probably the god Merdoch, god of the sun and spring, mentioned in Jeremiah 50 and 51; used to have the image of a great man, with a crown on its head and had seven horns of a bull. It was the tradition to present him every evening, with great quantities of food and drinks, assumed to be consumed by him, until the prophet Daniel revealed to the king that it was actually consumed by the priests and their families who entered into the temple at night through a secret door. This was mentioned in the story of “Bel” at the end of Book of Daniel (The second canonical Books).

Nebo, a Babylonian name, meaning ‘announcer,’ the god of knowledge, had the center of its worship in Borseba, not far from Babylon. The kings of Babylon used to carry its name preceding their names, like Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuzaradan etc.

These two gods were disgraced and exposed for their inability to protect their jewelries

from Cyrus; while the Living God, the true Savior of His people, carries our burdens and upholds us since the moment we were conceived, even to our old age and gray hair, confirming **“I am He... I will carry you.” (Is. 46: 4)** As if He is saying, ‘Although I have hosts of angels, beside several prophets, priests, and ministers, yet I put Myself down to carry the burdens of My people, to lift up their transgressions, and support them in all respects; I carry them on My shoulders.’

This is what God confirmed all along the ages, saying, *“I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out... I will feed My flock and make them lie down... I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick, but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment... I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey. I will judge between sheep and sheep”* (Ezekiel 34: 11 - 22) He also confirms: **“I am He... I carry...”** God, our Savior persists on calling us to Him to carry our burdens, saying, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11: 28) **“He has borne our grieves and carried our sorrows.” (Is. 53: 4)** **“He bore the sin of many.” (Is. 53: 12)** *“Who daily loads us with benefits.”* (Psalm 68: 19)

Our Lord Jesus came, not only to carry our burdens, and to atone our sins, but also to bear us in Him, to captivate us by His love, to lift us up to His glory. He descended to carry us in Him, to ascend in and by Him to His kingdom.

Going back to His talk in the book of Isaiah: **“I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” (Is. 46: 4)**

“I have made,” that is I allowed for the Babylonian captivity, to expose your infirmities.

“I will bear,” that is I will wipe away this disgrace, and will liberate you from captivity.

“I will carry,” that is I will carry your burdens, Myself... I, the hidden God.

“I will deliver,” that is I will enter with you to freedom, and bring you back to the Promised Land, and save you.

That is the work of God, the Savior: to make, to bear, to carry, and to deliver. He allows for the exposure of our sins, in order to realize that we are, not in captivity of Babylon, but in that of the devil and his evil works. He will bear, as He wiped away this disgrace, through His divine ordinance for our salvation. He will carry, as He took upon Himself our debt, and did not assign our salvation to an angel, an archangel, or a prophet; and finally He will deliver, as He will lift us up to His heavens, and grant us the fellowship of His divine glories.

The apostle Paul says, *“Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.”* (Hebrew 9: 28) He bowed His back to carry the sins of the whole world. He died for all, yet He is counted as a Savior, only for believers, those who accepted to let Him carry their burdens for them, to be carried righteous in Him, and to enter with them to the bosom of His Father.

❖ He died for the sake of all. His death was an alternative to the perdition of all humanity. Yet

He did not carry the sins of those who do not want Him to¹.

- ❖ Moses carried the Passover, but did not carry the sins of anyone; but this Lamb is carrying the sins of the whole world, that, having been in danger of perdition, He hastened to save it from the wrath of God².
- ❖ When they heard that He is to carry the sins of the world, they ran to Him, saying, ‘If it is possible for Him to take away the accusations against us, why should we hesitate when there is somebody to deliver with no labor on our part?’³

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He granted the world salvation by the Cross.

No man in history has reached such greatness, to be qualified to carry the sins of the whole world, not Enoch, nor Abraham, not even Isaac, who although, he gave himself up to death, yet was incapable of taking away the dirt of sin.

So, who is that great man by whose death the sin dies? He could not be a human being... God chose the Son, the Son of God who is above all, who could be offered for the sins of all.

It was necessary for Him to die, as through His conquest over death, He can deliver the others, who were like corpses lying in graves.

He broke down the servitude of lusts, and the shackles of death could not bind Him⁴.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ By Your passion loosen up my sufferings; by Your wounds heal my wounds; by Your blood purify my blood; In my flesh, mix the fragrance of life that is in Your holy body⁵.

St. John Saba

God carried our heavy sins in His Holy body, to grant us His righteousness in Him. We thus became, ourselves, carried in Him by His Holy Spirit, to be lifted up to His heavens. He had previously carried His ancient people from the land of servitude, with all their bitter burdens, to enter with them into the Promised Land, and to let them enter into Him: “*You have seen how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.*” (Exodus 19: 4) “*You saw how the Lord, your God, carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went, until you came to this place.*” (Deuteronomy 1: 31)

God confirmed His exalted love for us, upholding us since we were conceived, and have

¹ In Hebr. Hom 17:4.

² In John hom 17:1.

³ Ibid 18:1.

⁴ الحب الإلهي، ص 421.

⁵ الحب الإلهي، ص 429.

carried us since our birth, even to our old age and gray hairs (Is. 46: 3, 4). His love exceeds that of a mother who carries her baby inside her, and after his birth, during the first few years of his life. She carries him physically, and bears some of his troubles, yet unable to realize all of his hidden mysteries to share his burdens. God, on the other hand carries us even to our old age with all our apparent and hidden burdens. And as the Psalmist says, *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.”* (Psalm 27: 10)

There is no one who equals God in His love, not the parents, nor the other gods, who need somebody to make them, to carry them on the shoulder, to set them in place, and to protect them against burglars. Their worshippers cry out to them, yet, they do not answer, or save them from their troubles (Is. 46: 5 - 7).

2. CALLING CYRUS FROM THE EAST

This is the pleasure of God (Is. 46: 10) that He did in the past, is still doing, and shall always do, for the salvation of His people. He carried their burdens in the days of Moses, as they came out of the land of Egypt, carried them as they come out of the Babylonian captivity, and is still carrying them through the continuous sacrifice of the cross.

Cyrus - the symbol of the Lord Christ - was called *“a bird of prey”* (Is. 46: 11), because he was quick in descending on Babylon to seize it as a prey, with all its gods and treasures. He was a symbol of the Lord Christ, who attacks and destroys the kingdom of the devil, to restore to man his dignity, his freedom, and his spiritual richness.

“A man who executes My counsel, from a far country” (Is. 46: 11) is a symbol of the Lord Christ, coming from heaven to become *“the Son of Man,”* a Man to fulfill the purpose and pleasure of the Father.

Isaiah saw the Savior coming from afar, calling the far nations to approach Him and to enjoy His righteousness and salvation: *“Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness, I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off. My salvation shall not linger.”* (Is. 46: 12, 13)

He is probably addressing the stubborn-hearted Babylonians, proclaiming that their resistance to the righteousness and the salvation of God will not last longer; the time of salvation drew near. Or, He is addressing the stubborn-hearted nations to persuade them to receive the righteousness and salvation of God with no resistance.

CHAPTER 47

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Having likened Cyrus to a bird of prey descending on Babylon (Is. 46: 11) as a shadow of the redeeming work of the Lord Christ against the devil, now the prophet reveals what will occur to the tender and delicate Babylon, the arrogant queen of kingdoms. He is speaking of the work of sin and its fruits in the life of man.

1. The fall of Babylon 1-5.

2. The sins of Babylon 6-15.

1. THE FALL OF BABYLON

“Go down and sit in the dust, O Virgin daughter of Babylon. sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no more be called tender or delicate.” (Is. 47: 1)

Babylon has been called “Virgin,” a common name in the Holy Bible of cities (Is. 1: 8; 37: 22; Jeremiah 31: 21; 46: 11; Lamentations 1: 15). This Virgin is either betrothed to God, a holy bride like Jerusalem, or betrothed to the devil, to become his bride, united to him, carrying his kingdom of darkness.

As Babylon represents the fallen soul, through pride with luxuries, temporary joy and earthly lusts, what happened to it reveals what would occur to man because of sin.

What did happen to Babylon? Or what are the fruits of sins?

a. Having been the capital of the greatest nation of these days, it tended to follow all practices of luxuries and corruptions. Having the appearance of outer joy, it was overwhelmed by great sorrow, to sit in the dust (Is. 47: 1), as though she suffered the loss of her man or one of her beloved (Lamentations 3: 29).

The first work of sin is the loss of inner joy and the exalted peace of mind, to fill the soul with bitterness and despair, together with a feeling of isolation and deprivation.

❖ Yes, My God... In the absence of Your Light, death and nothingness would appear! O, how great is my misery, and how numerous are my wounds! Although You are the Comforter, the Grantor of peace, I separated myself from You! Although You are the Truth, yet, I did not seek Your counsel! My wickedness gave me deep wounds, because I did not walk the narrow way. Although You are the true life, yet I kept myself far away from You!¹

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 167، 170.

St. Augustine

b. In place of throne and authority Babylon would sit in the dust as a captive (Is. 47: 1).

God created man a master on earth; granted him dignity and authority, but pride got him down to the abyss, to the humiliation of slaves. He bows down to sin, and runs after bodily lusts like a slave, after having been a king who knows how to control his feelings and senses and all his energies for the sake of the kingdom of God, according to the wisdom saying, “*He who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city.*” (Proverbs 16: 32)

The Holy Bible warns us against pride, saying, “*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.*” (Proverbs 16: 18, 19)

❖ World glory likens a great hidden rock in the sea, a sailor unaware of its presence, will have the bottom of his boat’s broken up and sink¹.

St. Isaac the Syrian

c. After having been the haughty queen of kingdoms, Babylon ended up practicing the hard work of slaves; likened by the prophet Isaiah to a woman working a millstone to grind flour, a task that requires the cooperation of two women, or animals, if it is of big size.

And there she is ordered to take over that exhaustive work with nobody to help (Is. 47: 2); to be like Samson, who humiliated by sin, started to work the millstone in place of animals, amid laughter and reducible of his enemies.

St. John Chrysostom, talking to us about our ascension to heaven in the ascending Jesus Christ reveals to us how our life and nature went down to a level far lower than animals; but our Christ hauled us up through His ascension, and granted us the enjoyment of His heavens, saying,

[Behold, how our nature descended then ascended! There is nowhere lower than where man descended; and nowhere higher than where Christ ascended... that was expressed by the words of the apostle Paul, “*He who descended is also the One who ascended.*” Where to, did He descend? “*Into the lower parts of the earth;*” then ascended “*far above all the heavens*” (Ephesians 4: 9, 10)... We were nothing but dust and ashes... then became dumber than the donkey and ox (Is. 3: 1), than the stork in the heavens, and the turtledove and the swallow (Jeremiah 8: 7). We became less clever than the ants (Proverb 6: 6)... harder than the rocks, likened to serpents (Psalm 58: 5)... and called the children of the devil (John 8: 44). That was how far we descended in our unworthiness. But today, our nature exalted far above all creatures. Today the angels regained those whom they have lost long ago, those for whom they yearned to see again! Today they behold our nature in the divine throne glittering in eternal beauty and

¹ A.J. Wensinck: *Mystical Treatises, St. Isaac Syrian, p. 219.*

everlasting glory¹.]

d. **“Remove your veil, take off the skirt” (Is. 47: 2)**; something not worthy of young honorable girls at that time.

After its valuable, richly decorated military and commercial ships, used to sail, proclaiming its sovereignty over the world, she is told, **“Pass through the rivers; your nakedness shall be uncovered. Yes, your shame will be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will not arbitrate with a man.” (Is. 47: 3)** She destroyed many people and did many nations wrong, that is why she deserves to bear the shame of all her past deeds.

Sin always gets man into disgrace and shame. Sin made us lose divine grace, to become bare; but our Christ, who bears our sins, became naked for our sake, to offer Himself as a cover to our shameful nakedness.

❖ His crucifiers unclothed Him. Yet He **“as a sheep before its shearers is silent”!**

He forsook His clothes on the cross, to clothe those driven out naked from Paradise!

He gives them His clothes, to get, Himself ridiculed; realizing that they are convenient for the disgraced Adam.

They took off His clothes, then clothed Him with a robe as crimson as blood, to adorn the slain Groom!²

St. Jacob El-Serougi

e. She enters into a state of depression because of the disaster that befell her, thus she is unable to speak and lives in darkness, **“sit in silence and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you shall no longer be called the Lady of kingdoms.” (Is. 47: 5)**

2. THE SINS OF BABYLON

The order has been issued for the fall of Babylon, but not without proclaiming the basis of that verdict; as God in His love, always does to those condemned, in order to let others get the message, so as not to fall in the same transgression. The sins of Babylon were:

a. Violence and lack of mercy. God allowed for His people to be delivered to Babylon as a way of chastisement; but Babylon misused the situation, and practiced violence even against the aged, disregarding their old age (Is. 47: 6). God expected them to be compassionate toward His people, whom He loves, even though while chastising them.

b. She assumed that she is above the law. In practicing violence, she did not understand that what she is doing to others will be done to her. Being the mistress of all, she did not reflect

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 730 النخ.

² الحب الإلهي، ص 432.

on what might happen to her (Is. 47: 7).

c. Sticking to feeling of deceiving security and false peace, (Is. 47: 8), not based upon an encounter with God the Source of peace, but upon a belief that nothing bad would ever happen to someone with all that great position and wealth. She assumed that she would never become a widow or would suffer loss of children, but, ***“Those two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day: the loss of children, and widowhood. They shall come upon you in their fullness, because of the multitude of your sorceries, for the great abundance of your enchantments.”*** (Is. 47: 9)

She became a widow, having lost her kingdom, and also lost all her inhabitants that were like children to her.

d. Disregarding the fact that God is seeing her and is aware of her doings; trusting her wickedness, she said: *‘No one sees me.’*” (Is. 47: 10).

e. Leaning upon mere human wisdom (Is, 47: 10), together with sorceries and potent spells, she thought that the counsels of astrologers and stargazers would save her from what might come upon her; yet ***“as stubble, fire shall burn them, they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame.”*** (Is. 47: 11 - 15) There have been no country in the world, as well known for astrologers and stargazers as was Babylon (see the book of Daniel), and here the prophet ridicule them.

3
TALKS OF SALVATION

ISAIAH 48-59

CHAPTER 48

THE NEW EXODUS

Chapters 48 and 49 include talks about salvation, like the divine decree for the return to the homeland, prayer as a source of strength, and the joy of salvation.

After presenting a word of admonishment to His people, characterized by hypocrisy, stubborn-heart, and deviation to paganism, God revealed to them His aim, in delivering them to captivity. And finally, He declares the happy news, that He issued the order of their quick release, accompanied by redemption.

1. **God admonishes His people** 1-8.
2. **God's aim in allowing captivity** 9-19.
3. **The prompt and joyful salvation** 20-22.

1. GOD ADMONISHES HIS PEOPLE

In the previous chapter God exposed Babylon, the Virgin queen of kingdoms, which has been swept to a life of luxury, together with haughtiness and violence that led to a complete collapse. Now, before proclaiming the release of His people from captivity, He, in a fatherly manner, reveals their weaknesses and transgressions, and also His aim in allowing for their captivity, for the sake of keeping them from returning again to their sins.

The most serious danger facing Gnostic believers is probably hypocrisy together with formality of worship. God does not wish to humiliate them, but raised them up to an exalted level, and granted them spiritual possibilities to live with Him, the most important of which are:

- a. He called them "*Israel*" (Is. 48: 1), being His chosen people.
- b. A royal people: "**have come forth from the wellspring of Judah.**" (Is. 48: 1)
- c. They are attributed to the name of the Lord: "*who swear by in the name of the Lord, and make mention the Lord of Israel.*" (Is. 48: 1) Although they were aware that He is the One real God, they worshiped Him, albeit in formal laterality, devoid of spirit, "*but not in truth or in righteousness.*"
- d. They enjoyed the city of Jerusalem (Is. 48: 2), the holy city of God that embraced His temple.
- e. They rely on the God of Israel (Is. 48: 2); take pride in His covenants, and lean on Him (Micah 3: 11).

f. They enjoyed divine prophecies; God announced to them, things to come (Is. 48: 3), to let them abide in their faith in Him, and to believe His words and promises. Knowing how stubborn they were - how the sinews of their necks were iron, and their foreheads were bronze, He knew that they could hardly believe prophetic words, therefore He presented them with prophecies that would be realized in the near future, to lead them into believing them, and to give them the ability to discern between God and the idols (Is. 48: 5).

Despite all these possibilities presented to them by God, they led a life of hypocrisy, worshipping Him with a Pharisee-like way, besides mixing between God and idol-worship. They disregarded and despised words of prophesy, and misunderstood their mysteries; so He rebukes them by saying,

“Surely you did not hear. Surely you did not know. Surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and were called transgressor from the womb.”(Is. 48: 8)

Being preoccupied with talking about spiritual insight and sanctified inner ear, Isaiah’s talk concerning the Savior seemed to many - even to the majority - in his days, as something almost impossible.

The Savior did come; nevertheless, He was rejected by many, despite the numerous prophecies in the Old Testament concerning His Person, beside His redeeming works. The world is still in need of the true insight and the sanctified ear. Even those who believed in Him and accepted Him are in need of that, in order to be able to enjoy deeper mysteries, and to apprehend the hidden inner heavenly glories.

We are all in need of being accompanied by the Lord of glory, to walk with us and talk to us, to say with the two disciples of Emmaus: *“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”* (Luke 24: 32)

- ❖ O my God... You are my light; open my eyes to behold Your divine splendor, and to be able to walk my way without stumbling in the snares of the enemy.
- ❖ You are the Light that illuminated Jacob’s mind, to reveal to his sons the things to come.

St. Augustine¹

2. GOD’S AIM IN ALLOWING CAPTIVITY

a. ***“For My name’s sake I defy My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off.” (Is. 48: 9)*** In other words, that people should have perished and utterly cut off; yet God with His zeal for His name and glory, chose to chastise them, in the hope that they might return to Him. As though captivity is a divine ‘gift’ presented to beloved children,

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص70، 74.

despite their unworthiness of that fatherly love.

This is a splendid spiritual look at chastisement, through which the believer comprehends its significance as a sign of fatherly love. The apostle says, “*For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons*” (Hebrew 12: 6, 7)

- ❖ If lack of chastising is a sign of illegitimacy (Hebrew 12: 8), we should rejoice for getting chastised, considering it as a sign of our legitimate sonhood!¹

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ A father will not chastise his son if he does not love him, and a teacher will never try to straighten the ways of his student, unless he sees in him certain signs of promise. When a physician stops his efforts to cure his patient that would be a sign that he gave up hope in his recovery².

St. Jerome

- ❖ “*I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.*” (Psalm 89: 32) It is out of mercy, that God, not only calls them, but also chastises and scourges them. Let your father’s hand be on you; and if you are a good son, do not protest his chastisement, as long as he does not take his mercy away from you, or deprive you of your right to inheritance. That is what you should be afraid of.

I wish the pious children would not say, “If you intend to come to us with a rod, do not care to come at all.” It is better for you to learn by your father’s rod than to perish through enemy’s care³.

- ❖ God, who preserves the simple-hearted (Psalm 116: 6) will scourge those, who, when they become mature, He would seek them to become His heirs.

He helped me in my time of affliction. The pain caused by a surgeon’s scalpel is not meant as a punishment but as a gift⁴.

St. Augustine.

b. For refining: “*I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.*” (Is. 48: 10) We are God’s silver and gold, whom He cares to test in the furnace of pain and affliction.

- ❖ Blessed is he, who is chastised in this life twice; as God does not punish twice for the same

¹ In Hebr. 29:33.

² Ep. 118:1.

³ On Ps. 89.

⁴ On Ps. 116.

offense (Neh. 1: 9)¹.

St. Jerome

c. God, who allows us to be chastised for the sake of our refinement, will lift it up as soon as it fulfills its goal. He called heavens and earth, together with all His creation to witness His amazing salvation. He loved Cyrus and chose him to carry out His purpose against Babylon (Is. 48: 14).

What Cyrus accomplishes, is not through his own will, but through that of God, the Savior of His people.

“I, even I, have spoken.; Yes I have called him. I will brought him, and his way will prosper... From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent me.”(Is. 48: 15, 16)

God and His Holy Spirit sent Cyrus, as a symbol of the Lord Christ, who came by His own will, and, at the same time, was sent by the Father and the Holy Spirit. How was that?

This demonstrates the unity of the Holy Trinity, as inseparable *Hypostasies*, of one divine essence that works for the salvation of mankind.

The Father loves humanity, and in His love He sent His Word who is inseparable from Him. The sacrifice of Christ is counted as a gift from the Father, and as said by the Lord Christ Himself, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3: 16)

The Father, the Lover of mankind, sent His Son as a sacrifice of love. The Son, in His turn, offered Himself willingly, in obedience to the Father, according to the words of the apostle: *“who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* (Galatians 2: 20)

As to the Holy Spirit, He had a positive role in the whole work of salvation. Through Him, the divine incarnation in the womb of the Virgin Mary was realized (Luke 1: 35); Jesus went up the mountain to be tempted, and He testifies for the Lord Christ (John 15: 26).

d. For the sake of obedience to the Father: Captivity did not happen by a chance, but as a fruit of rebellion; without which they would not have fallen under it. That is why it became their duty, on their return, to practice obedience, to enjoy the righteousness and goodness of God:

“Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Your descendants also would have been like the sand, and the offsprings of your body like the grains of sand. His name would not have been cut off nor destroyed before Me.” (Is. 48: 18, 19)

If they had obeyed God, they would have, not only spared themselves falling into the Babylonian captivity, but would have also been flooded with God’s peace, like a wide, deep, and

¹ On Ps. Hom. 51.

continuously running river, to quench the thirst of many.

3. THE PROMPT AND JOYFUL SALVATION

God offers a call for exodus: **“Leave Babylon. Flee from the Babylonians.” (Is. 48: 20)** Although God sent Cyrus for their salvation, yet He does not let them go out against their free will, but calls and persuades them to do that. They did; and 40, 000 of them returned on the hands of Zerubbabel (See Nehemiah 9: 36 - 39).

It is a continuous call for our exodus from every offensive situation, under the leadership of our Savior, to set ourselves free by the Spirit of God, from their yoke; like when Lot and his household were called to leave Sodom and Gomorrah.

Fleeing from evil is not weakness or passivism, but is a positive act, through which man, by the Spirit of God, proclaims his victory over his depths, that yearn for, and enjoy such offensive situations.

That call is accompanied with joy for the salvation work of the Lord, **“Announce this with shouts of joy.” (Is, 48: 20)**

As the prophet Isaiah looks forward to freedom from captivity, as a second exodus, he recalls the exodus of God’s people from the servitude of Pharaoh on the hands of Moses, who, by God’s grace, gave them water from the rock in the wilderness, to quench their thirst. In this new exodus, they enjoy the same gift:

“They did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. He caused the water to flow from the rock for them. He also split the rock and water gushed out.” (Is. 48: 21)

This was realized, as Christ’s salvation was connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit, on the day of the Pentecost, as a fountain of living water that flooded the Church of Christ.

Finally, this salvation is optional; who does not receive it, is deprived of the exalted peace of God, who said, **“There is no peace for the wicked.” (Is. 48: 22)**

❖ We were told that the voice of mirth and that of gladness ceased to come out of their mouths (see Jeremiah 7: 34). Yes, the feasts of the wicked are nothing but woes.

❖ Those rejecting prayers and thanksgiving, deprive themselves of the fruits of joy.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic¹

In the Septuagint version it came: **“There is no (joy) for the wicked.” St. Augustine²** discerned between the temporary joy of the wicked, connected with the temporary things, and that ends with them, and the joy of the righteous who rejoice even in their shackles. The martyr Crispina rejoiced as she was shackled and led to trial, then as she was imprisoned. Her joy was

¹ Pasch. Ep. 2,3.

² On Ps. 138.

before the angels, according to the words of the Psalmist: “*Before the (angels) I will sing praises for You.*” (Psalm 138: 1)

CHAPTER 49

MISSION OF THE SAVIOR

In the previous chapter, the Savior proclaimed His mission saying, “*And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me.*” (Is. 48: 16). Now He talks about that unique mission, in which the Son Himself glorifies us in Him, casts away the shame of humiliation, setting us a heavenly bride and a queen, to sit beside Christ the King, who fulfills all our needs.

1. **Humility and glorification of the Savior** 1-7.
2. **His redemptive work** 8-13.
3. **Setting the desolate an everlasting bride** 13-21.
4. **Setting the forsaken a queen** 22-23.
5. **God, the Redeemer of His Church** 24-26.

1. HUMILITY AND GLORIFICATION OF THE SAVIOR

In the previous chapter He is addressing “*the house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel*” (Is. 48: 1), but here He is addressing the nations, saying, “***Listen O coastlands to Me, and take heed you peoples from afar.***” (Is. 49: 1)

Nations have been called “*the coastland peoples*” (Genesis 10: 5), as the islands of the Mediterranean Sea have been looked upon as lands remote and foreign to Israel. He called nations “*from afar,*” as they did not enter into fellowship with Israel.

The Lord Christ addresses the nations to proclaim the following:

a. He is called from the matrix: “***From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.***” (Is. 49: 1) Some scholars believe that He speaks here in the name of Israel, the people God has chosen before they exist, as they were within the bodies of Abraham and Sarah. Others believe it to be Cyrus, whom God has chosen to realize His will, well before he even existed. But it is rather obvious that the talk here is concerning the Lord Christ, the incarnate Son of God. The Archangel Gabriel, as He gave the good news of His birth to the Virgin Mary, before she got conceived by the Holy Spirit, called Him “*Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.*” (Matthew 1: 21) That is why it is said: “***From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name***” (is. 49: 1).

b. He has authority: “***He made My mouth like a sharp sword***” (Is. 49: 2). It is said of the Lord Christ, “*Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.*” (Revelation 1: 16) “*He taught them as One having authority, and not as the scribes.*” (Matthew 7: 29) He entered the battle against the devil, by His word, which is like “*a two-edged sword.*” (Hebrews 4: 12)

c. Concealing the mystery of Christ, His redeeming evangelic work, and His call for nations to faith, behind the shadow of the Mosaic Law and the prophecies, saying, ***“In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me.” (Is. 49: 2)***

He probably meant by that what happened in His infancy, when king Herod plotted to have Him killed, and the Father sent an angel to Joseph to order him to flee with the mother and child to Egypt. The Word has become flesh. The Son of God has become a Son of Man; that is why, in His humility, He walked our way as one of us, protected in the shadow of His Father’s hand, although He was capable of wiping out Herod together with all His opponents.

“He made Me a polished shaft. In His quiver He has hidden Me.” (Is. 49: 2)

Being the Word of God, He is a polished arrow, concealed behind the shadows and symbols, until the fulfillment of time, to proclaim Himself through the cross as an arrow, shot against the devil and his hosts, *“and having disarmed principalities and powers, he made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them in it.”* (Colossians 2: 15) He is the arrow, the Killer of evil, and the Grantor of wounds of divine love for the believing souls that cry out saying, *“I am wounded with love.”* (Songs 2: 5 LXX)

❖ The Holy Bible teaches us *“God is love”* (I John 4: 8). He aimed His Only-Begotten Son *“His chosen arrow”* toward the chosen, inserting its triple head in the spirit of life.

The arrowhead is the faith that binds the shooter of the arrow (Christ) to those shot by it; as though the soul is exalted up by divine lifts, to behold within her the sweet arrow of love wounding her. How nice is this wound, and how sweet is its pain; by it life pierces the soul¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ Can anyone behold the numerous divine wounds of love, like those in the book of the Song of Songs, of her, who complains to be *“love-wounds”* (Songs 2: 5 LXX)? Who can behold the arrow that wounds numerous souls with the love of God, but He who says, *“He made Me into a polished arrow.”*²

❖ If somebody, at any time, gets inflamed by the genuine love for the Word of God; if somebody received the sweet wounds of that *“polished arrow;”* if somebody is wounded by the shaft of its knowledge-worthy of every love, to yearn to it day and night, unable to speak or think of anything else, to desire or hope for anything else - his soul can truly say, *“I am love-wounded.”* She accepts her wound from Him, of whom is said: ***“He made Me into a polished shaft. In His quiver he has hidden Me”*** (Is. 49: 2) I wish God would inflict our souls with such wounds, would wound them with such arrows and shafts, would strike them

¹ *Comm. On Cant., Serm 4.*

² *In John, book 1:36.*

with such healing wounds!¹

Origen

- ❖ The words of God are arrows that cause love and not pain... that is how we should understand: *“Your arrows pierces me deeply”* (Psalm 32: 2)².
- ❖ I wish the unhealthy would get wounded, because when they do, they become healthy. Let them, having dwelt in the Church-the body of Christ... say with the Church, *“I am wounded sick.”* (Song 2:5 LXX)

St. Augustine³

d. By the cross, the Son obediently submitted to the Father; for our sake He became a slave, for the Father to be glorified in Him, and He, in His turn, to be likewise glorified in the weakness of the cross.

“He said to Me, ‘You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’ Then I said, ‘I have labored in vain. I have spent My strength for nothing. Yet surely My just reward is with the Lord, and My work with My God.’” (Is. 49: 3, 4)

Some might ask: Who is His servant, Israel? He is the Lord Christ who came forth from the Jews, and, though, equal in essence to God, He accepted servitude by His own will (Philippians 2: 7); He came as a slave, to lift the slaves in Him, up to the adoption to God. By this He glorified the Father, and was likewise glorified through weakness, according to the apostle: *“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ I Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2: 8-11)

In the moments of passion, as the Lord appeared as though in weakness, He addressed the Father saying, *“I have glorified You on earth, I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”* (John 17: 4, 5)

If the cross is shame and weakness from outside, yet it is glory within. **Origen** says, [We do not hesitate to say that Christ’s goodness appears in a greater way and with divine splendor, in the light of the fact that *“He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross.”* (Philippians 2: 6, 8)⁴]

¹ *Comm. On Cant.* 3;8.

² *On Pa.* 38.

³ *On Ps.* 144.

⁴ *In John* 1:37.

The cross is also a glory, as it reconciled mankind with the Father, and opened before us the gates of Paradise, to share with the Lord His glory, and to live with Him, praising Him together with the heavenly hosts.

Some believe what is said here concerns the Church who is hidden in the Savior, being the new Israel, that glorifies God, through sharing in the crucifixion of her Christ, to enjoy the power and joy of His resurrection. That is why she is worthy of hearing the divine voice, “**You are My servant O Israel, in whom I will be glorified;**” while, in her passion she says, “**I have labored to no purpose. I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing, yet what is due me is in the Lord’s hand, and my reward is with my God.**” (Is. 49: 4).

e. The success of the mission of the Lord Christ, to embrace the Gentiles into faith: The Lord appeared on the cross, as though in weakness, deserted by all. “*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*” (John 1: 11) “*He was wounded in the house of His friends*” (Zechariah 13: 6), to say, “**I have labored to no purpose, I have spent My strength in vain and for nothing**” (Is. 49: 4, 6). This is the outer appearance of the cross, yet its inner work is strongly proclaimed by the Father, addressing the Crucified:

“It is too small a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel. I will also give You as a Light for the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Is. 49: 6)

It is, as though He is saying to the Crucified Son, ‘The fruit of your redeeming work could not be confined to the boundaries of a certain people, but should extend to the ends of the earth; so that You become Light for the Gentiles, and the mystery of divine salvation for all mankind.’

When the Simon took the infant Jesus up in his arms, he said, “*For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of the peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.*” (Luke 2: 30, 31)

And as Paul and Barnabas said: “*For the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set You to be a Light to the Gentiles, that You should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’*” (Acts 13: 47)

Origen says, [If He did not become a Servant, He would not have restored the tribes of Jacob, would not have changed the distracted heart of Israel, nor would have become Light for the Gentiles, for the salvation of the whole world¹.]

Our Christ came as Light to peoples and nations; “*the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world*” (John 1: 9); “*called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2: 9); to walk in the light,” *to become the sons of light and sons of the day*” (1 Thessalonians 5: 5); and to become “*the light of the world*” (Matthew 5: 14); to realize the saying of the prophet Isaiah: “*The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the*

¹ In John, Book 1:37.

moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself, for the Lord will be your everlasting light.” (Is. 60: 19, 20)

The Savior - the Light of the nations - will cast His light on the soul, being His bride, “*to show (her) the mysteries of wisdom.*” (Job 11: 6)

- ❖ O my God and my Lord... the light of my soul! Keep on illuminating my steps! My God... You are my hope... without Your light - by which we behold everything - we cannot discover the maneuvers and tricks of the devil.
- ❖ You, the Word who said: “*Let there be light,*” and there was light, say these words again now, for my eyes to behold the true light, and to discern between it and the darkness; as, without you, how can I be able to do that?¹

St. Augustine

The Jews insulted and denied Him, crying out demanding His crucifixion, while the pagan nations received Him, submitted to Him by faith, and accepted His work. That is why, although the Master was called “the despised,” “abhorred by the nation,” and “the servant of rulers.” Yet, at the same time, it was said: To Him, “*Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship.*” (Is. 49: 7)

2. HIS REDEMPTIVE WORK

We have a marvelous divine talk that reveals the mystery of our inexpressible salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Christ the Savior we gain the following:

a. God’s response to us; It is high time for the Father to respond to us, through His beloved Son, who is crucified as a sacrifice of obedience to the Father, and object of His pleasure, granting us Himself as a Father, and His bosom as a place of everlasting comfort to dwell in. That is what He meant by saying, “*In an acceptable time I have heard You.*” (Is. 49: 8)

Yes, It is high time to hear that the Father has accepted us in the Son who is accepted Him from eternity.

b. By Christ Jesus, our Savior, God Himself became a support and helper to us: “*In the day of salvation I have helped you.*” (Is. 49: 8)

God took on Himself the leadership of the battle against the devil, having us hidden in Him to gain conquest and triumph; as said by the apostle, “*Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every*

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 71، 74-75.

place.” (2 Corinthians 2: 14)

And as said by **St. Augustine**: [Let us rejoice, as this is the day in which the main corner stone became our Intercessor¹.]

We should discern between **“the day of salvation” (Is. 49: 8)** (i.e. the day of the Lord), and our own days. The day of the Lord is joyful, granting salvation, while our days, in which we live according to our desires, are destructive and perishing. **St. Augustine** says, [I call them days of my misery, days of my death, days according to Adam, full of labor and sweat, days according to the ancient corruption. The Psalmist cries out saying, *“I sink in deep mire”* (Psalm 69: 2); *“You have made my days as handbreadths”* (Psalm 39: 5); *“in those days I call you”* (Ps. 166:2) Yes, my days are different from those of my Lord².]

c. By the Crucified One we became kept in the Lord, who says, **“I will preserve you.” (Is. 49: 8)**

In His farewell prayer, the Savior says, *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one... Sanctify them by Your truth.”* (John 17: 15)

d. Enjoying the Crucified One as a Covenant with the Father: **“I will give You as a Covenant for the people, to restore the earth, To cause them to inherit the desolate heritage.” (Is. 49: 8)**

God offered His New covenant, not inscribed on stone, but it is written by blood in the body of the incarnate Word. Through this covenant, the Church will not enjoy the Promised Land, flooding with milk and honey, but will inherit the land, namely the nations that were desolate like wilderness, to turn them into a divine paradise and heavenly kingdom. In His human body, He reconciled humanity with the Father, and set in the heart of every true believer, an unutterable inheritance.

The features of this royal kingdom, the inner inheritance, or true evangelic Church life, are:

a. Freedom; **“That you may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’” (Is. 49: 9)**

He broke down the walls of Hades and granted us the freedom of the children of God, to live having *“the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy”* (Luke 10: 19), to walk in the light, with no authority of darkness over us.

Our Savior granted us inner freedom, from servitude to the evil one, to lusts of the body, or to love of the world; Yet, what is far more important, is not to be slaves to the ego, but to be

¹ On Ps. 118.

² On Ps. 166.

crucified together with our Christ, the Savior, to proclaim how far our heart became wide enough, to accommodate in it the infinite God together with all mankind, even those opposing us.

Through this inner freedom, we willingly accept submission to God as His slaves, to live free with no authority of the enemy over our depths.

- ❖ Be a slave and free at the same time. Be a slave through submission to God, and free from servitude to any one, to any vain compliment, or to any lust¹.
- ❖ Free yourself of the bonds of sin, as “*Christ made us free*” (Galatians 5: 1). Seek the liberty of the new world throughout your contemporary life. Do not enslave yourself to love of money, nor to any compliment from men².
- ❖ Do not set laws for yourself. Do not get enslaved by laws of your own. Be free.
- ❖ A man of position is allowed to do whatever he likes³.
- ❖ Free yourself of the yoke of the world, by the liberty of the new life⁴.
- ❖ Be free from any destructive servitude; because unless you become free, you will not be working for Christ. The Kingdom of the free heavenly Jerusalem does not receive slaves. Sons of the free mother are themselves free (Rom. 8: 5), and are not enslaved to anyone or anything in the world⁵.
- ❖ Do not commit yourself to something beyond your capacity, so as not to enslave yourself to need to please others⁶.

Fr. John, the Syrian Hermit

b. Enjoyment of fertile divine pasture: “***They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all desolate heights.***” (Is. 49: 9) What is this road other than the Savior who called Himself “*the Way*” (John 14: 6)? Through Him we get to fruitful heights, where we find all our needs, to suffer “*neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the heat or the sun strike us,*” where we enjoy springs of the Holy Spirit, as living water to quench our thirst and give us fruit (Is. 49: 10).

c. Enjoyment of a paved road that leads us into the divine bosoms: “***I will make each of my mountains a road, and My highways shall be elevated.***” (Is. 49: 11) What are these

¹ Letter to Hesychius, 25.

² Ibid 26.

³ Ibid 27.

⁴ Ibid 29.

⁵ Ibid 30.

⁶ Ibid 22.

mountains but the commandments of the Lord, that seem like un-climbable high mountains. Yet, by our union with Christ “the Way,” walking on these mountains would become natural, and the commandment would turn into pleasure and enjoyment, not into deprivation and severe orders.

While making the difficult commandment easy, turning the high mountains into a road along which we find pleasure to walk, He says, “*My highways will be elevated,*” namely, making the commandment easy does not mean our descending to lowly levels, and taking it easy with ourselves as far as bodily lusts and desires are concerned, but, on the contrary, He elevates our ways up to practice the exalted heavenly life with joy of heart, and pleasure in God.

d. Opening the gates of the Church before all nations from east, west, north and south: “*Surely these shall come from afar-Look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim*” (Is. 49: 12) By those who will come from afar, He means of the Far East, and by the region of Aswan, south of Egypt, to represent those coming from the south.

e. Enjoyment of life of praise and joy, as a life lived by the soul (heavens), and practiced by the body (earth), and expressed through human energies (mountains). Thus, heavens would share with earth (and its mountains) in the praise for God:

“*Break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have mercy on His afflicted*” (Is. 40: 13)

The mystery of our joy is comforts of God, proclaimed by the Holy Spirit in our depths, through worthiness of the precious blood; The Crucified has set us up from our misery, and had compassion on us with His practical mercy.

That joy applies to the Church as a whole, extending along the ages, and also in heaven. That is why Pope **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, [We are not alone in our joy, as in heaven, “*the Church of the firstborns*” (Hebrew 12: 23) rejoices with us... Behold, my friends, all creation keeps the feast with us, as the Psalmist says, “*Let everything that have breath praise the Lord*” (Psalm 150: 6), for the sake of destroying our enemies and for our salvation¹.]

Now, we see how God moved from speaking of Cyrus, as savior of the people of God from captivity, to what is greater and more lasting, to speaking of the Lord Christ. He is the Savior of all mankind, from everlasting captivity, who grants them the blessings of His redemption, through letting them enter into His kingdom, namely enjoying the new joyful church life in the Lord, as a paradisiac life presented to all peoples and nations.

3. SETTING THE DESOLATE AN EVERLASTING BRIDE

The people of God did not expect to fall into captivity, and when Israel, the northern kingdom was captivated, the Kingdom of Judah assumed that that would never happen to it, as it

¹ Pasch. Letters 6.

embraces the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, the city of God. Yet Judah was captivated, and Jerusalem collapsed, together with the temple, that they desecrated with heathen worship, as stated by Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Then the captives thought that it would be only a matter of few months, then God would surely intervene and set them free; but months and years passed by, and the people assuming that God forgot them, got a feeling of isolation, and desolation, as expressed by the prophet: **“Zion said: ‘The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.’” (Is. 49: 14)**

That feeling of isolation and desolation is a natural fruit suffered by most humans, if not all of them, at certain moments. Man in time of temptation feels himself lonely, with nobody to share his troubles or to feel his inner bitterness.

Psychiatrists say that this ailment, they call ‘feeling of loneliness,’ is almost common to all adolescents, as they think that even those closest to them are not able to appreciate their real inner world and hidden feelings.

The cure for this ailment is an encounter with the Savior, who, alone, can enter into the depths of the soul, and proclaim by His cross a unique personal relationship, through which we enjoy an exalted divine love, and a union with God, that time and events could never destroy. By the cross, the Lord embraced humanity, as a holy heavenly bride, never to be forsaken by her heavenly Groom, instead of the feeling of loneliness.

It is strange that the Savior Himself cried out on the cross saying, *“Eloi, Eloi, (that is), My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”* (Mark 15: 34) He, as a representative of humanity, proclaims our situation as forsaken and desolate! By the cross, He seemed as though forsaken, to take away from us the feeling of forsaking and desolation, and to bring us back to the divine bosoms, a holy bride.

Now, How does the Lord respond to Zion’s feeling of desolation?

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb?” (Is. 49: 15) There is no doubt that motherhood is considered, of the highest levels of human love; the mother who carries her child as a fetus in her womb for months would never forget him or her after birth. And yet, some mothers have done that, and offered their children as human sacrifices, casting them in fire, as a kind of worship to the god Baal. In certain famines we heard of mothers who ate up their children, and we still hear nowadays of crimes committed by mothers against their children, and of parents killing the souls and personalities of their kids, through the dark family atmosphere, or by the familial tragedies as separation and divorce!

Some fathers and mothers do not have any compassion on the new generations, nor taking them into account in their lives; but, in selfishness, they act at the expense of their kids’ lives and their spiritual, psychological, social, and even material peace.

A mother may forget the baby at her breast, but God will never forget us!

- ❖ God’s care and love, demonstrated through His goodness, He finds nothing better to compare to, than a mother’s heart full of love and compassion. As he wants to liken God’s love to human emotions, he found no other love among His creation better than this to compare with.

Abbot Sheramon¹

- ❖ He does not just care for us, but loves us with no limits, a flaring unquenchable holy love, and a truly unbreakable strong love.
- ❖ The prophet responds to those who got depressed and moaned: “*The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me,*” by saying, “*can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has borne?*”

If it is not possible for a mother to forget her baby, it is much more so with God, who can never forget humanity. He does not mean to compare God’s love to mother’s love for her baby, as God’s love is definitely greater; that is why he says, “***Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you.***” (Is. 49: 15)

See how God’s love surpasses mothers’ love?

The Lord of prophets and the Master of all confirms that His love is stronger than that of a father toward his children... Listen to what He says, “*What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him*” (Matthew 7: 9-11)?

Like the difference between good and evil, so God’s love is far stronger than feelings of parents toward their children².

St. John Chrysostom

There are other examples, as the love of the lover to his beloved, but God’s love is not equal to this kind of love. (Ps. 103:11)

“***See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.***” (Is. 49: 16) According to ancient customs of the East, man used to engrave the name of his beloved on the palms of his hands, a sign that he would never forget her even to death, and that all what he does with his hands are for her sake. The Lord engraved the name of His beloved Church on His palms with the nails of the cross, for the wounds to remain a sign of everlasting love! He even engraved the name of every single member of her on His palm, as a sign of His personal love for each of us by name.

“***Your walls are continually before Me.***” (Is. 49: 16) As though He is saying, I know that your walls were destroyed, but I shall never forget them; and shall rebuild them, yet at the

¹ Cassian: Conf. 13:17.

² On Providence. 6. ترجمة مدام عابدة حنا بسطا.

right time. I shall restore your strength and: ***“Your sons shall make haste. Your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you.” (Is. 49: 17)***

Who are those sons hastening to Zion but the receivers of faith who come to the Church of the New Testament, to enjoy its walls, not built by man? And who are the destroyers, other than those deniers of faith, who should be cast away?

“Lift up your eyes and look around and see. All these gather together and come to you. ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘you shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, and bind them on you as a bride does.” (Is. 49: 18)

What a magnificent portrait of the Church of the New Testament, for in place of the city whose walls were destroyed, whose inhabitants were driven away as captives, and into it entered the destroyers, God will establish the Church of the New Testament. She will not be established, just as a fortified city to which its children hasten, and from which the destroyers are driven out, but to become a heavenly bride who wears a unique ornament - that is the gathering together in it of its children, as children of God, who have the freedom of inner glory. As it was the case in the East, where children were considered as their mother’s beauty, of whom she is proud, as her glory and bridal gown, so also the Church will be proud of her children, glorified in them, as a bridal precious girdle with which she is adorned.

She will be a fruitful bride, a mother with many spiritual children, whom the earth would not be wide enough to accommodate.

The enemy is not expected to stand still, but will try to enter to destroy her children, having previously destroyed the faith of some of them, saying to her: ***“This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.” (Is. 49: 20)***. But she beholding the amazing hand of God that works in her, despite the persistent opposition of the enemy, says in her heart, ***“Who has begotten these for me, since I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive and wandering to and fro? And who has brought these up? There I was left alone; But these, where were they?” (Is. 49: 21)***

It is God’s exalted grace, that “out of the eater brought something to eat, and out of the strong brought something sweet”! It is His rich grace that sets in us fruits with no limit, as a free divine gift for His believers who walk by the Spirit.

4. SETTING THE FORSAKEN A QUEEN

After living as a forsaken humble slave in the land of captivity, Zion now returns to her homeland as a queen carried on shoulders, before whom kings will bow down, and lick the dust at her feet.

That is the work of God in the life of a soul previously humiliated by sin; setting her a queen, who sits on the right hand of the king, and whom every one yearns to serve.

“I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the

peoples.”(Is. 49: 22)

What is lifting the hand, but the coming of the Lord Christ to the world to stretch His hands on the cross, to embrace the Gentiles, according to His words: “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.*” (John 12: 32) As to the standard set by Him, it is the “*Banner of love*” (Song 2: 4), namely the proclamation of redemption on the cross.

By that work of salvation, the Church of Christ is glorified, as to her it is said: “*They shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughter shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth; they will lick up the dust of your feet*” (Is. 49: 22, 23)

This has been realized: Kings and queens became believers, working in the Church of the Lord, like Constantine the Great and Helen, who served the Church as a spiritual queen, above all.

5. GOD, THE REDEEMER OF HIS CHURCH

These promises seemed fanciful to the contemporaries of Isaiah, and later on to the captives, that is why God confirmed that He, Himself, will realize that salvation, being the only One capable of devastating the mighty devil, and of restoring from him those he captivated.

” *Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the righteous be delivered? But thus says the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered. For I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children. I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine. All flesh shall know, that I, the Lord, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.*” (Is. 49: 24 - 26)

Thus it is fitting for us to trust in God, our Savior, and should not be disturbed before the fierceness and violence of the devil, because the Savior is capable of setting us free from his captivity, to restore us to His Church. Leading the battle by Himself, He will make the enemy eat his own flesh, and be drunk by his own blood, that is to say, his work will get back over his head, to taste its bitterness, until he becomes unconscious as if drunk.

CHAPTER 50

“I GAVE MY BACK TO THOSE WHO STRUCK ME”

In the previous chapter we saw a marvelous portrait of God’s salvation work, having proclaimed that His love for us is greater than that of a mother toward her newborn. He would never forget His people, but has engraved them on the palms of His hands; has set them as a holy bride and a crowned queen to share His heavenly glories. Before that divine love, the Jewish nation stood furious. Now, He is now admonishing it for her denial of faith in Him, seeking her acceptance of the work of the Cross in her life.

- 1. A certificate of divorce 1-3.**
- 2. Obedience of the cross 4-9.**
- 3. A call for obedience 10-11.**

1. A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE

The Jew, when divorcing his wife, even with no reasonable cause, used to give her a certificate of divorce, before sending her out of his house. He could also sell her as a slave to his creditors (Deuteronomy 24: 1 - 3), and could sell his children as well. God, on His part, did not do that to them, He is asking the Jewish nation who denied Him, and rejected His faith, about her certificate of divorce if any, in confirmation that He did not intend to divorce or dismiss her, but she divorced herself by her own will, and dismissed herself out of God’s house, her Groom, through her transgressions and uncleanness, breaking the holy matrimony.

“Thus says the Lord: ‘Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away.’” (Is. 50: 1)

“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” (John 1: 11) That is why, in a fatherly admonition, he asks the deniers of faith to provide the certificate of divorce or the creditor’s name to whom He delivered His children. As though He is saying to them, that He did not wish to divorce their mother, or to sell them to anyone. She chose the devil, His enemy, a groom; and you as well, sold yourselves for the lusts and desires of sins; and as the Lord Christ said to His oppressors: *“You are of your father the devil.”* (John 8: 44)

Abbot Abraham in the *“Conferences”* of **Cassian** says, [The same lusts we enjoy, will turn into punishment for us; the joys and enjoyments will turn into sufferings¹.]

Origen believes that the Jewish Sanhedrin has committed adultery against the Groom and

¹ *Cassian: Conf. 24:24.*

killed Him (John 19: 6, 15; Luke 23: 18). [She (the Jewish nation), as a bride, rebelled against her man, more than he did against her. He, who sent her away, rejected and rebuked her because of alienating herself from him¹.]

If He has sent her away, it was because she rejected Him and dismissed herself by her free will, so He gave her the wish of her evil heart. The Lord Christ came as though to His house, to find no one there. She deserted Him together with her children (Is. 50: 2). He tried to call her back, with no avail. She did not respond to his call, and deprived Him of his parental and matrimonial rights.

St. John Chrysostom says, [He utters these things to reveal that we initiated the desertion that led to our perdition. God does not wish to forsake or punish us; and even if He does, it would be, as though it is against His will, saying,] *‘I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord God, ‘Therefore turn and live.’*” (Ezekiel 18: 32) Jesus cries for the devastation of Jerusalem, like we do for our friends².]

God does not wish us to perish, but wants us to act always like a bride rejoicing for her Groom, and not like a rebellious wife who deserts her home. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [He went deeper to quote another impressive example, saying, *“As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”* (Is. 62: 5) As love between newly married couples is at its maximum in the beginning of their life, He used this analogy to let us appreciate how far His true love for us goes³.]

From her side, she forsook Him and refused to live in the eternal heavenly joy; yet from His side, He continues to work capably for their sake, as a Savior He redeem them with His life, saying,

“Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the river a wilderness. Their fish stink because there is no water, and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.” (Is. 50: 2, 3)

The Lord came by Himself, as though to His own household, as a Savior, after having called them through the Law and the prophets. Yet His nation and His own said mockingly: *“He saved others. Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him.”* (Matthew 27: 42)

That was how His own nation ridiculed Him, although He made a way for her through the Red Sea and across the River Jordan, and despite the fact that at His crucifixion, nature rebelled, the sun and the moon eclipsed, and darkness fell on the face of the earth.

¹ In Matt., Book 14:17.

² In John, hom. 68:2.

³ On Providence, 6.

2. OBEDIENCE OF THE CROSS

Some scholars and Fathers believe that the speaker here is the prophet Isaiah, who proclaims that God granted him the “*tongue of the learned,*” to sustain the weary souls with the living word of God. That word has no specific time, but works in him every morning, to grant him a spiritual ear, capable of hearkening to the divine voice (Is. 50: 4).

❖ **“*He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.*” (Is. 50: 4)**

Namely, He granted me an additional spiritual ear... After the Spirit granted him the heart of prophets, he no longer has a human heart, but a spiritual one, as said by the apostle: “*We have the mind of Christ.*” (1 Corinthians 2: 16) As though he is saying, I received the blessing of the Spirit, and learned things unutterable by man, or comprehended by no one, even prophets, through their own minds¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ The prophet Isaiah heard more than any other prophet did... In the same way, believers hear more than (catechumens); the later should understand, that they are not being taught by men but “*they are taught by the Lord.*” (Is. 54: 13)²

St. John Chrysostom

If Isaiah speaks of himself as having been granted an additional spiritual ear, more so than several other prophets have got, he is also speaking of himself as a symbol of the Lord Christ, the way the prophet David did, when he spoke of himself as a symbol of the Messiah.

If Christ came as a Teacher to humanity, He came unique in this concern as far as:

a. Although He is the Word of God, Grantor of wisdom and knowledge, He received our Manhood, to become the Son of Man, who submits and obeys. He is the ‘Hebrew slave,’ who willingly approaches His Master on the day of the jubilee, to get his ear pierced, out of love for His Father’s house. That is why He says,

“*The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not rebellious, nor I turn away*” (Is. 50: 5)

He willingly presented Himself, not just to get His ear pierced (Exodus 21:6), but to deliver His life; He obeyed to the point of death, death of the cross. In His loving obedience, He, not only offered His ears to piercing, but also His back to striking, His cheeks to beard plucking, and His face to spitting. He offered His whole life, suffering pain, so that we, the rebels, might be counted as obedient in Him, and we, who contemplate in Him might find comfort.

- ❖ Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is an example to teach us how to bear sufferance. By His

¹ In 1 Cor. Hom 7.

² In 2 Cor. Hom 2.

own will He allowed them to lead Him - the all goodness - to death. Following His example, we can trample over serpents, scorpions, and all powers of the enemy¹.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

- ❖ You may say, ‘The enemy is horrible and dangerous; he cannot be opposed...’ Look at him again, and compare him with another image, to learn how to despise him. All accusations, insults, rebukes, ridicules, and plans of the enemies, are like a garment eaten by the moths (Is. 50: 9)... Now, do not let any of this trouble you; stop seeking help from this or that; do not chase shadows. But insistently seek Jesus whom you serve; With a little bow of His head, all evils will come to an end².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He chose to bear all these things to comfort those who suffer³.

St. Augustine

In a clear and frank prophecy, Isaiah spoke of the events of the cross, saying on the tongue of the Savior:

“I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard. I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.” (Is. 50: 6)

- ❖ For me, my Lord, You did not hide Your face from shame and spitting... You came to slaughtering like a lamb, even to the cross...

The Liturgy of St. Gregory

- ❖ You ignorant, how did you dare to spit on His face? How did your tongue dare?
How did the earth bear to watch that scene?
How horrible and amazing for man to see the wax spits on flame!
That also happened because of Adam, who was worthy of being spat on. Instead of the slave who sinned, the Master Himself bore all that shame!
He offered His face to receive spitting, as He promised in the book of Isaiah not to hide His face from shame of spitting!

Mar Jacob El-Serougui⁴

The Lord Christ delivered Himself to passion, bearing shame and disgrace, in order to consummate for our sake, and in our name, the way of obedience, proclaiming that passion and shame are not able to destroy believers, and confirming that the way of the cross is royal, leading

¹ *Pasc. Letters, 8.*

² *To Olympias, 1:2.*

³ *On Ps., 92.*

⁴ الحب الإلهي، ص 424.

us to His righteousness, saying, **“I will not be ashamed; He is near who justifies Me.”** (Is. 50: 7, 8) And the apostle Paul says, *“through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.”* (Romans 3: 25)

❖ As to saying, *“to demonstrate His righteousness,”* He means, not only being righteous, but to make of those covered by soars of the filthy sin righteous.

Therefore do not doubt... Do not reject the righteousness of God, which is not through works (of Law), but through the (living) faith, that is easy and open to all¹.

St. John Chrysostom

3. AN INVITATION FOR OBEDIENCE

The Lord obeyed, to call us to obedience; becoming an example, as well as help, in which we hide to walk along the way of obedience, saying, **“Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God.”** (Is. 50: 10)

As though, whoever wants to enjoy the light of obedience, and to hear the voice of God and His Messiah, let him rely on Him to get saved from the darkness of rebellion.

He likens the rebels to those who kindle a fire of their own (Is. 50: 11), to burn for the Lord a foreign incense, not that of obedience mixed with love, but incense of selfishness and relyness on oneself. Therefore we should not kindle the fire of our own righteousness and human wisdom, but accept the fire of the Holy Spirit of God, Grantor of righteousness and obedience to commandment.

❖ I wish we do not walk in the light of our own fire (Is. 50: 11), and in the sparks we have kindled. I know of a purified fire, sent by Christ on the earth (Luke 12: 49). He Himself symbolically seemed as a fire that would consume all our bad habits; that fire He wishes to kindle swiftly, yearning to hasten us to do goodness².

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 424-425.

² *Oration on the Holy Baptism* 40:36.

CHAPTER 51

THE REDEEMED PEOPLE

In the previous chapter, the Lord Christ appeared as a Savior who obeyed the Father even to death, so that, by His obedience, He redeems and saves us from the spirit of rebellion, granting us the spirit of obedience by Him and in Him. Now, in the present chapter, we find Him calling His people to enjoy redemption as a joyful evangelic life, a life resurrected in Him. Through this life, we enjoy a continuous exodus under His leadership, with the spirit of conquest over the powers of darkness. This is the mystery of comfort.

- 1. An invitation to enjoy the work of redemption 1-16.**
- 2. The mystery of the fall of Jerusalem 17-20.**
- 3. Rise after fall 21-23.**

1. AN INVITATION TO ENJOY THE WORK OF REDEMPTION

In this invitation, the word “*Listen*” or “*Hear*,” is repeated three times (Is. 51: 1, 4, 7). If the Word of God has listened and obeyed - He, the Creator, the Judge, and Lawgiver - it is fitting for His people to follow His example. It is not possible for us to enter into evangelic life, and to enjoy the free salvation unless we listen and hearken, to let God work in us.

What does this invitation imply?

a. The repetition of the word “*Listen*” means that this call, in its deep sense, is an invitation for obedience that of faith filled with trust and love of God.

- ❖ [Obedience makes friends of God.] He says, “*If you love Me keep My commandments.*” (John 14: 15) He did not say, “Do miracles,” but said: “*Keep My commandments.*” Later, He said: “*You are My friends*” (John 15: 14), not if you cast out demons, but “*If you do whatever I command you.*” So let us strive to become friends of God, and not to remain His enemies¹.

St. John Chrysostom

b. “*Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the Lord.*” (Is. 51: 1) By obedience, listening is transformed into practical behavior, namely pursuing righteousness, or walking along the way of God’s righteousness. The goal of that, is seeking the Lord, encountering Him, and unifying with Him. This is the essence of our faith, and our Christianity: listening, obedience, life, and union with the Lord!

¹ In Hebr. Hom 24:8.

c. Following the example of Abraham's faith: "**Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who bore you. When I called him alone, and I blessed him and increased him.**" (Is. 51: 1, 2)

As though He is saying to them: If you find this call difficult to follow; saying, How can we listen to God's voice, pursue His righteousness, and seek Him in our life? Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who gave you birth. Abraham came from a heathen family. The whole world at that time actually deviated from the knowledge of God's way. Abraham came, as though from solid rock and from mud in a den. He never heard from his parents a word of comfort, received a divine law, nor found support from a priest or a prophet. Yet when God called him he responded. Because he was unique in his faith, "*I blessed and increased him... and My people came from him!*"

If we assume that Adam has been created out of dust; and that we were hewn out of rock, with no spiritual sense, we should not despair, as our father Abraham has also been a descendant of Adam, yet he received the call, obeyed, and gained the divine covenants in his descendants.

Abraham has been an old man, and Sarah was barren, with a womb as hard as a rock, incapable of giving birth; yet God set from these rocks descendants for Abraham.

❖ God can set children out of rocks... A child conceived in a rock-like womb, is as though born out of rocks. Now, in this prophecy (Is. 51: 1, 2) you can see Him revealing to them how from the beginning, He set for them a father through a kind of miracle, as though out of a rock; and what occurred in the past, can also be realized now (Matthew 3: 5)¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ God can make out of rocks children for Abraham; referring here to the Gentiles, who were like stones, because of the hardness of their hearts. Let us read: "*I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.*" (Ezekiel 36: 26) He wanted to reveal how God is capable of creating from solid rocks a believing people².

St. Jerome

d. A comforting invitation, as God turns Zion's ruins and deserts into a paradise. This is God's work in His Church, granting His people the fruits of His Holy Spirit to transform all to a kingdom, fruitful in Spirit. "**The Lord will comfort Zion. He will comfort all her waste places. He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord.**" (Is. 51: 3)

The book of Isaiah often speaks of the redeeming work of God, as setting of a fruitful kingdom of God, and as transforming wasteland into a spiritual garden (Is. 32: 5), where the

¹ In Matt. Hom 11:3.

² In Matt. 3:9.

Truth dwells (Is. 32: 6); and which rejoices in God who dwells in it (Is. 35: 1), and transforms it into a paradise and heaven.

St. John Chrysostom looked at the Church, especially when practicing the Liturgy of the Eucharist, as though it is heaven, saying, [It is higher than heaven, and wider than the whole world¹.] Then speaks on the tongue of the Lord Christ, saying,

[I planted you in paradise, but the devil chased you out!

Look, Here I am planting you in Me!

I am supporting you, so that the devil will not be able to come near you!

I am not lifting you up to heaven, but to here, where the Lord of heaven is!

I am carrying you in Me, I, the Lord of heaven²!]

St. Clement of Alexandria³ says that the Church on earth is an icon of that in heaven. And also says, [When you register yourself as a member of God's people, heaven will become your city, and God your Lawgiver⁴.]

e. An invitation for joy and gladness: ***“Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and voice of melody.”*** (Is. 51: 3) This line is obvious in the book as a whole, being the book of salvation, proclaiming the setting of inner kingdom of joy, singing, and continuous praise.

When **St. John Cassian** visited Egypt, and saw how its deserts and villages, from Alexandria to Aswan, have been filled with monks, from whom nothing is heard but the voice of incessant praise, he considered himself in heaven, and wondered if these were earthly angels, or heavenly humans?

That is the genuine feature of the Church: an inner incessant joy, that reflects on its whole life! Mrs. Butcher noticed, how there was not a single icon in the poor churches of Old Cairo that shows the image of a martyr suffering of pain, nor one showing torture in Hades. But all icons radiate the spirit of joy and hope; even the martyrs, are seen in them, looking toward heaven, to the crown of their glory.

That joy reflected on worship. Almost every day, the Church celebrates a feast of the Lord, of a prophet, an apostle, an angel, or a martyr, etc. The Church is creating an atmosphere of spiritual joy, amid the troubles of this world, to give her children the chance to experience the comforts of the Holy Spirit and its heavenly joy; to let the believer share with the heavenly hosts their liturgies and continuous peaceful and joyful praises.

One of the prominent features of joy in the Coptic Church is that the Holy Bible, during Liturgies, is always read in a melodic way that fills the soul with comfort. This was noticed and

¹ الكنيسة تحبك، ص 42.

² *De poen* PG. 49-336.

³ *Strom.* 4:8:66.

⁴ *Prot.* 10:108.

acknowledged by Mr. Leeder the prominent English author, who visited Egypt at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

f. An invitation for preaching: As whoever enjoys the joy of salvation, would never abstain from testifying to evangelic life. It would bear God's Law and Gospel a "*light of the peoples*" (Is. 51: 4), confirming to everyone that life in Christ is not far fetched nor impossible; righteousness of Christ is near to every heart (Is. 51: 5), and His arms are extended with love on the Cross to all nations, being the hope for all (Is. 51: 5).

Preaching or testifying to the redeeming work of Christ is a fundamental part of every Christian's life, not confined to priests alone. That is why **St. John Chrysostom** says,

[There is nothing valueless like a Christian who does not care for the salvation of others.

If you say, 'I am poor' the two mites of the widow would put you to shame. Peter also said, "*I have neither gold nor silver;*" and Paul has been so poor to suffer sometimes from hunger!

Do not make excuses of tough life circumstances; theirs has been also tough!

Do not make excuses of ignorance; they were illiterate!

You may be a running slave; but Onsimus was like you!

If you claim you are sick; so was Timothy!

Each of us can help his brother, even with the good will, in case he is unable to do something more positive!

Do not ever say that you cannot affect others. As long as you are a Christian, you cannot be but effective. This is the essence of being a Christian!

If you say that you are a Christian, yet you are unable to do something for others, you are contradicting yourself, as though you are saying that the sun is unable to give light¹.]

g. An invitation for an everlasting salvation that goes beyond heavens and earth: "***Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner. But My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished.***" (Is. 51: 6)

Heavens and earth vanishing, while salvation lasts forever, refer to crucifying the old man, to enjoy the new man, who is according to the image of his Creator. The old heaven and the old earth have to vanish in us, so as to enjoy the new heaven and the new earth, whose inhabitants do not die like flies, but is dwelt by eternal righteousness of the Lord.

If heaven refers to the soul, and earth refers to the flesh, vanishing of heaven and wearing out of the earth mean demolishing the works of the old man - soul and flesh - in order to have our

¹ An Acts, hom 20:4 ; PG. 60:162.

souls and bodies sanctified, being the new and the daily renewable creation, through the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

As to saying, “*Those who dwell in it will die in a like manner,*” (Is. 51: 6) this refers to feebleness of the works of the old man; they die like flies! But works of the new man are the righteousness of Christ, or the love that will never fail.

h. A serious and brave invitation that would not falter before the resistance of men: “***Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their revilings. For the moth will eat them up like a garment; and the worm will devour them like wool. But My righteousness will last forever. My salvation from generation to generation***” (Is. 61: 7, 8)

Whoever lifts his eyes toward the eternal Savior, would not care for the reaction and resistance of men; all will vanish, but our salvation will last forever.

The spiritual living human being sees his old man, that he took off in the water of Baptism, as a worn-out garment, and as flies that died of feebleness. He sees the reproaches and insults of people, as a garment eaten by moth, or wool devoured by worm! They are all temporary worldly affairs that would not last long. By bearing them we partake of our Savior, who readily faced reproaches and insults for our sake; and exchanged evil with love, enduring the weakness of the wicked.

- ❖ Do not quench a fire by another fire, but by water.
- ❖ There is nothing that prevents evildoers from continuing in their evil like treating them with tenderness, in return to the harm they cause.

St. John Chrysostom¹

i. An invitation for enjoying the resurrected life that gained victory over death, and pierced the vicious monster by the arm of the Lord: “***Awake, awake! Put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are you not the arm that cut Rahab apart, and wounded the serpent?***” (Is. 51: 9)

The Church is “***the arm of the Lord***” clothed with the power of His resurrection, to wake up as though from the sleep of death. Let the whole Church awake, both of Jewish or Gentile origin; that is why He says the word “***awake***” twice.

God, the Grantor of victory, gave her in the days gone by, strength to conquer Rahab (a poetic name of Egypt), when He rescued her from Pharaoh, who drowned in the waters of the Red Sea, as a helpless, pierced through monster. The same God is granting His Church in the New Testament, the strength of His resurrection, not to conquer Pharaoh, but the powers of darkness, not to find its way across the sea, but to cross to heaven itself.

¹ In Matt. Hom 18:1.

- ❖ Now, as death is conquered (through the resurrection of Christ), and the kingdom of the devil is destroyed, all have rejoiced¹.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

j. An invitation for enjoying God Himself as a Comforter: **“I, even I, am who comforts you.” (Is. 51: 12)** We should never seek human comforts, nor fear mortal men, who are nothing but grass (Is. 51: 12).

Enjoying God’s comforts, we should not fear man, who is mortal, together with his afflictions; because if we do, **“We shall fear continually every day.” (Is. 51:13)** There is nothing that warrants that.

Captives, overcome by despair, who expected to die in captivity, had their hope revived by God who confirmed to them: **“The captive exile hastens that he may be loosed, that he should not die in the pit, and that his bread should not fail.” (Is. 51: 14)**

It is fitting for them to look forward to the realization of God’s promise, and never to despair. If the kingdom of Babylon had drowned them like the sea, the Savior, the Lord of hosts is capable of rescuing them. **“For I am the Lord your God, who divided the sea whose waves roared. The Lord of hosts is His name.” (Is. 51: 15)**

2. THE MYSTERY OF THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

Having presented this joyful invitation to enjoy the new life in the Lord, He wanted to clarify the mystery of Jerusalem’s fall into captivity, in order to let her realize her weaknesses and rise up from her fall. So He began by saying, **“Awake, awake! Stand up Jerusalem.” (Is. 51: 17)** Exposing her weaknesses does not imply demeaning her, but to help her deal with them, to **“awake and stand up.”** Her weaknesses resulted from the fact that she has, **“You who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury... You have drunk the dregs, of the cup of trembling and drained it out.” (Is. 51: 17)**

It was the custom to offer those condemned to death a cup of strong wine, to let them stagger before their execution. So Jerusalem drank from the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury, to let her realize that her punishment was not just falling into captivity by Babylon, but falling under the verdict of death, as her sins have actually captivated her, and made her lose consciousness.

She, by her freewill, drank from the cup of rebellion and staggered, not to find among her children, he who holds her hand. She became like a mother, shamelessly despised by her own children, to get console only from: **“desolation and destruction, famine and sword.” (Is. 51: 19)**

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 644.

3. RISE AFTER FALL

With every exposure of weakness or evil, God opens wide a door of hope for salvation. That is why, having revealed to her the cause of her fall, not merely into Babylonian captivity, but into that of sin, and her drinking from the cup of God's fury to stagger, He got back to confirm that He forgives her, to hand the cup to her tormentors who said to her, "***Lie down that we may walk over you.***' ***And you have laid your body like the ground, and as the street, for those who walk over.***" (Is. 51: 23) It was the custom for the victorious to tread with their feet over the necks of the defeated. She was humiliated because she forsook God and rebelled against Him. But now, He is going to forgive her and to set her free!

CHAPTER 52

THE JOY OF SALVATION

Having proclaimed His collective invitation to enjoy the unique work of salvation, and revealed the weaknesses of His people, because of which they tasted bitterness, He now opens widely the door of hope, and speaks of the joy and splendor of salvation.

1. Put on your garments of splendor 1-2.
2. Free salvation 3-6.
3. Bringing good tidings 7-10.
4. Departure from evil 11-12.
5. The glory of God's Servant 13-15.

1. PUT ON YOUR GARMENTS OF SPLENDOR

“Awake, awake! Put on your strength O Zion. Put on you your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean will no longer come to you. Shake yourself from the dust. Arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem. Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.” (Is. 52: 1, 2)

While confirming the return of the people from captivity with unexpected dignity, the prophet is talking of the return of humanity to its original state; its return to the spiritual city of God, and its enjoyment of His exalted splendor, to live free from any defilement, as God planned for it.

God loves man, and yearns to let him enter His glories, to live a holy dignified and glorious life. That is why that invitation came to enjoy the following divine blessings:

a. The resurrected glorious life: *“Awake, awake!”* She descended as though into a grave, to lie in darkness and corruption. That was the condition of Israel in Babylon, where they lost every hope of returning to their land and of freedom, to count themselves as dead. That is the condition of every man, captivated by sin, to have his inner life collapsed, to lose good will, and ability to enjoy the holy life, and to become like a dead corrupted corpse. He is in need of someone to wake him up from the death of sin, and to grant him the new life of resurrection. The apostle says, *“awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”* (Ephesians 5: 14) *“He raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* (Ephesians 2: 6)

Now, the Savior came to every fallen and humiliated soul, to say to her: *“When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love, so I spread the corner of my garment over you.”* (Ezekiel 16: 8)

What does spreading the corner of His garment over her, but accepting her as a bride, to unite with Him and to enjoy His resurrected life? He came to her as a Groom, to find in Him “resurrection,” to wake up as though from eternal death. That is what the apostle meant by saying, “*For if by the one man’s offense, death reigned through that one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.*” (Romans 5: 17)

When the soul unites with her Groom, the Life-giver, she takes off its grave clothes to put on those of the wedding: “***Put on your strength O Zion. Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem the holy city.***” (Is. 52: 1) He tells her: “*I clothed you with an embroidered dress and gave you sandals of badger skin I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments... You were exceedingly beautiful and succeeded to royalty... Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,’ says the Lord God.*” (Ezekiel 16: 10 - 14)

What is this clothing with which the splendor of the Lord is poured on His bride to become very beautiful, and to be like a queen, but the Person of Christ Himself, in whom we hide, according to the expression of the apostle: “*You have put on Christ.*” (Galatians 3: 27).

- ❖ It is fitting for the whole Church to rejoice, praising the Lord Christ, as did the saintly women, when they became sure that the Lord has risen, He who awakened humanity from sleep, granting it life and filling it with the light of faith¹.

St. Jerome

- ❖ Today is the “Feast of the Resurrection;” for me, it is a new beginning.
- ❖ I am anointed by the divine sacrament that brought me to this shining day, giving help to my weakness, to be granted by him, who has risen, life for my soul; “*to put on the new man, which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness*” (Ephesians 4: 23, 24), and to make me one of the new creation, of those born from God... to make me ready to die with Him and rise with Him...

Yesterday (the great Friday), the Lamb was slain, and the lintel and the two doorposts were sprinkled with His blood... When the destroyer angel with his sword passed by, we were not terrified, because the precious blood keeps us.

Yesterday, I was crucified with Christ. Today, I am glorified in Him!

Yesterday, I died with Christ. Today, I was granted life with Him!

Yesterday, I was buried with Christ. Today I rise with Him!

Whoever got to understand this great mystery in Christ, and what He did for us, but did

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 638.

not give his soul to Christ, he gave Him nothing!¹

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

b. It will become a holy city, into which no uncircumcised or defiled (namely foreigners) will enter again. Being the city of God, it will be sanctified from any defilement, to carry the nature of heavenly life, worthy of the heavenly King.

❖ And now dear friends... Satan was slain, that monster, who is an opponent to the whole world. We are not approaching a worldly feast, but a continuous heavenly one.

Now, death is abolished, and the kingdom of the devil is destroyed; so every thing is filled with joy and happiness. We should approach this feast, not with a defiled garment, but should clothe our souls with pure ones. We should put on Christ, to be worthy of celebrating the feast with Him. We put Him on, when we love virtue and hate evil, when we practice purity and put our lusts to death, when we love righteousness and not transgression, when we adorn ourselves with reasonable mind, when we open our doors before all people and we forget not the poor, when we help the weak and reject pride².

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

c. **“Shakes yourself from the dust;”** The soul will no longer desire the temporary things, but will first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then everything else will be added; will live, set forth toward eternity, free from all bonds of the world.

d. Rise up, sit on her royal throne (Is. 52: 2); after having been a captive slave, sitting on dust, and serving her masters in humility, she is now on the right of the heavenly King. And as the Psalmist says, *“At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir”* (Psalm 45: 9).

e. Enjoy freedom: **“Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”** (Is. 52: 2) After having been dragged by the neck as an animal, she regained the dignity of freedom, to live a mistress of herself, to have inner authority. If sin humiliates man to drag him anywhere it likes, as a toy in the hands of the devil, in Jesus Christ, man would live like a king (Revelation 1: 6), with authority over his heart, thoughts, feelings, and body.

In short, man rises up from the death of sin, takes off his grave clothes to put on Christ Himself as an eternal garment; reject every defilement to carry in himself the righteousness of Christ; shakes off the dust of earthly loves, to soar up in heaven; rises from humility to sit on the right hand of God, to participate in glory; and to have his inner chains loosened, to enjoy the freedom of God’s children.

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 654-657.

² الحب الإلهي، ص 643-644.

2. FREE SALVATION

“For thus says the Lord, ‘you have sold yourself for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.’”(Is. 52: 3) God did not sell His people to Babylon, but it was they who sold themselves through forsaking God and rebelling against Him; so He delivered them to their enemies. Neither they nor God got any benefit. Babylon did not thank God for delivering them, but blasphemed Him instead. God did not wish to deliver His people to Babylon; they made Him do that, by delivering themselves to sin and pagan defilements.

God’s people previously went to Egypt, and were humiliated by Pharaoh. They did not learn their lesson, and sold themselves to Assyria who afflicted them for no reason or challenge. Yet God always intervenes to save His people and to glorify His Holy Name.

We also delivered ourselves to the authority of sin, and enslaved ourselves to the devil for nothing... Now, the Savior came to give us free salvation, not by gold or silver, but by His precious blood (Revelation 5: 9).

3. BRINGING THE GOOD TIDINGS

The good tidings of bringing the people back from captivity came from the Lord Himself who reigns over His people (Is. 52: 7). Voices of singing and praise were heard, not for their return to their homeland, but because *“the Lord brings back Zion” (Is. 52: 8)*. He came by Himself to comfort His people, and to *“lay bare His holy arm”* to repair the desolation that happened to them and to His city, to proclaim *“in the sight of all nations” (Is. 52: 10)*, to have His name glorified by the entire world.

Talk has been more so about the good news concerning the Gospel of salvation, *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” (Is. 52: 7)*

What are these beautiful feet but the Church of the New Testament, that utters through the Word of God (the mountains), to preach the Gospel, and to proclaim that our Lord Jesus has reigned on a cross, and resurrected us with Him?

❖ Isaiah believes that there is nothing more beautiful or fitting than the preaching of the apostles walking in the Lord who says, *“I am the Way,”* commending the feet of those walking that way of Jesus Christ; as through it, they enter to God (the Father). They bring the good tidings, those with beautiful feet, as Jesus became for them (a way for their feet and the mystery of their beauty)¹.

Origen

¹ On John 1:11.

- ❖ As they preach for us the Gospel of peace, previously prophesied, “*How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim peace, who bring glad tidings of good things.*” (Is. 52: 7) Each one of us starts to become a son of peace, through his keeping and his faith in that Gospel; as he is justified by faith, he gains peace with God¹.
- ❖ Who are the feet of the Lord? They are the saintly Evangelists!²
- ❖ Through the beautiful feet of men, bringing the good tidings, the hearts of humanity became an open way for the Lord³.

St. Augustine

4. DEPARTURE FROM EVIL

With the Spirit of prophecy, Isaiah saw the priests carrying the vessels of the Lord - previously taken by Nebuchadnezzar, and used with no respect to drink wine, by Belshazzar (Daniel 5) - in a dignified procession that lasted about four months.

The prophet Isaiah revealed the mystery of the dignity of that procession:

a. On the negative side: Departure from evil, and continuous liberation from the captivity of sin. “***Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Go out from the midst of her, be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord.***” (Is. 52: 11) It is a call for continuous separation from evil. “‘*Come out from among them, and be separate,*’ says the Lord, ‘*Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters.*’” (2 Corinthians 6: 17, 18))

❖ Paul advises saying, “*Put away from yourselves that wicked person... that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.*” (1 Corinthians 5: 13, 2) How really horrible is the congregation of the wicked; their plague quickly move and infect all who deal with them... “*Evil company corrupts good habits.*” (1 Corinthians 15: 33)... I wish no one of us would have an evil friend⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

b. On the positive side: Receiving God Himself as the leader of the procession, makes us go confidently, trusting in the ability of our leader and in His protection all along the way. “***But you will not go out with haste, not go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.***” (Is. 52: 12)

¹ *On Rebuke and Grace, ch. 46.*

² *On Ps. 52.*

³ *On Ps. 68.*

⁴ *In John hom 57:3.*

5. THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Having commended to let the Lord Savior lead the procession, he presented us with a portrait of the glory of the Savior, who became a Servant, to be glorified on our behalf and in our name. The ancient Jews interpreted this text as concerning the Messiah.

a. **“Behold, My Servant...” (Is. 52: 13):** The Word became flesh, and as a representative of humanity He was counted a Servant to the Father, so that we in Him, are counted obedient to God.

b. **“He shall deal prudently. He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.” (Is 52: 13)** He is the wisdom of God. For our sake, He received the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, to rest upon Him (Is. 11: 2), although He is His Holy Spirit, inseparable from Him.

c. Because of His appearance on the cross, the heavenly hosts and earthly beings were astonished. **“Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.” (Is. 52: 14)** This is proclaimed more clearly in the following chapter. **“He has no form or comeliness, and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” (Is. 53: 2, 3)**

d. Through that painful appearance as a sacrifice nailed on the cross, He sprinkled the nations with His blood to sanctify them for Himself, and shut the mouths of kings (probably means the powers of darkness), having seen salvation, they have not heard of before.

CHAPTER 53

THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

This remarkable chapter has been always considered as one of the most beloved to believers, because it reveals the mystery of the cross and its power, as the Lord outstretched His arms in practical love to redeem humanity, according to His words: “*I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.*” (Exodus 6: 6)

He talked about the appearance of the Savior, saying, “*His visage was marred more than any man.*” (Is. 52: 14) Yet he said that through that painful appearance, He sprinkled His love and blood on many nations to redeem them (Is. 52: 15). This is what this Chapter is clearly revealing. And as **St. Clement of Rome**, says, [Christ is Christ of the humble and not of the arrogant. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the rod of authority of God’s greatness, did not come in a procession of pride and vanity, although He could have so done, but He came in humility, as the Holy Spirit has proclaimed about Him¹.]

1. The cross as an exalted mystery 1.
2. The cross as shame and disgrace 2-3.
3. The cross as redemption and salvation 4-12.

1. THE CROSS AS AN EXALTED MYSTERY

The prophet begins his talk of the cross by saying, “*Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*” (Is. 53: 1)

If the contemporaries of the prophet Isaiah did not receive the prophecies that concerned the appearance of Cyrus, who would restore the people from the Babylonian captivity, how then could they believe what concerns the cross? It is truly an amazing mystery, before which both the heavenly hosts and men stand astounded, seeing the revelation of the arm of the Lord through incarnation, outstretching His hands on the cross to embrace the nations, granting them the strength and joy of His resurrection, through their sharing in His passion and crucifixion.

❖ God, the Son of God, the arm of God sustains such passion!²

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

The revelation of the arm of God, or the incarnation of the Word of God, remains a subject of amazement for both the heavenly and earthly creation; how can the Word become flesh?

¹ Ep. 1:16.

² Cat. Lect, 13:13.

- ❖ By what words can we bless God, and what thanksgiving can we offer Him?

He loved us so much that, although He is the eternal, who was there before creation itself, became in age younger than many of His ministers in the world!

As a child, He passed through speechless childhood. He, the “Word,” without whom, all human eloquence is unable to utter a word.

Behold, what God became, for your sake! Although a human, wishing to be a god you lost your way. Yet although He is God, He became human, to restore him who lost his way!

Human pride brought you down, so that, through divine humility alone, you may soar above!¹

St. Augustine

- ❖ Nobody could speak about Your eternity; so let me try to speak with astonishment of Your coming, my Teacher.

Love attracted You to come to our country for our sake. Although You are our Lord, You became with us, and one of us.

Here Emanuel is with us and beside us; that is why unworthy tongues spoke!²

St. Jacob El-Serougi

By saying “*To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*” (Is. 53: 1) He meant the appearance of the Lord Christ, not just historically - something that astounded all creation, but His presence in our personal life, or His continuous transfiguration in the heart, as a source of inner satisfaction.

- ❖ Do not forget that **Christ is the arm of the Lord!** Do not let the (spiritual enemies) rejoice saying, ‘Christians are only here for a limited time!’³
- ❖ “*To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*” By giving you His Christ, He is granting you His arm; and by giving you His arm He is granting you His Christ. He leads man to the Way, through leading him to His Christ; and leads him to His Christ, through leading to the Way; Christ is the Truth⁴.
- ❖ “*You open your hand; they are filled with goods.*” (Psalm 104: 28) What does opening your hands to the Lord mean? Christ is your hand... “*To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*” It is opened when it is revealed, as revelation is opening. “*You open your hand; they are filled with goods;*” When you reveal your Christ, you become filled with goods.⁵

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 341-342.

² الحب الإلهي، ص 244.

³ On Ps. 71.

⁴ On Ps 86.

⁵ On Ps 104.

St. Augustine

Our Christ - the arm of the Lord - has been revealed to us, to enjoy Him as the mystery of our life, saying, *“The 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)

2. THE CROSS AS SHAME AND DISGRACE

The Lord Savior came as a shoot growing before Israel, and as a root out of dry ground. That is why He was despised by people, especially His own.

“He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant” (Is. 53: 2). He came a descendant of David, as a tiny plant, as a tender shoot, although He is the Creator of the vine. He came concealed in humility, to be symbolized by the “Burning Bush,” which seems as a weak helpless plant, although by His divinity, He is flaming fire!

He came *“before”* Israel, being the Shepherd who precedes His flock!

“And as a root out of dry ground” (Is. 53: 2); He came in an unexpected way. The Jews thought that the Messiah would come as a great king with authority, capable of destroying the Roman Empire, to establish a nation that masters the world; But He came like a concealed root out of dry land, not expected to grow nor to give fruit. He came out of a dry land, being born to St. Mary, betrothed to Joseph the carpenter, both poor; *“He became poor, that you, through His poverty might become rich.”* (2 Corinthians 8: 9).

The Lord Christ came as a root out of a dry ground, as the Jews at that time were passing through a stage of severe dryness; He came amid dryness to make from the desert a Paradise. Of Him the bride said: *“Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.”* (Song 2: 3)

“He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”(Is. 53: 2, 3)

Here, the prophet moves from the incarnation scene to that of crucifixion; In the incarnation he saw a tender shoot of the descent of David, and a root out of a dry ground; He came as a Son of Man, when all humanity, including the people of God, were completely dry; and came out of a poor surroundings, that made Nathaniel say, *“does anything good comes out of Nazareth?”* Now the prophet looks at the scene of the cross, to see Him of ***“no form or comeliness, of no beauty, despised, nobody dares to come near Him, a man of sorrows, and we hide our faces from Him”***

❖ He has no form or beauty in the eyes of the Jews, yet in David’s eye, *“He was fairer than the sons of men.”* (Psalm 45: 2) On the Mount (during transfiguration), *“His face shone like the*

sun” (Matthew 17: 2), referring us to His future mystery¹.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

- ❖ He, who was “*fairer than the sons of men,*” was seen by men on the cross with no form or beauty, with bowed head, and uncomely stature. Yet that lack of beauty of your Savior has added to your own beauty, as “*The royal daughter is all glorious within...*” (Psalm 45: 13)².

St. Augustine

3. THE CROSS AS REDEMPTION AND SALVATION

Having talked about the cross from outside He entered with us into the depths to discover its mystery and power, as a sacrifice of transgression and atonement for our sins, saying, “***Surely He has borne our grieves and carried our sorrows; yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted.***” (Is. 53: 4)

What He took up was not His sorrows nor His infirmities, but ours. What He is voluntarily and lovingly bending to carry in His body is the burden of our sins.

- ❖ He took up our sins and infirmities; nevertheless He did not suffer anything that needs cure. He, like us, was tempted in everything, with no sin of His own. Whoever could oppose the light that shines in the darkness?³
- ❖ He has been crushed and wounded; yet He healed every infirmity and every weakness⁴.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

- ❖ Do not be ashamed of the Crucified, but you should rather be proud of Him, saying, He carried our sins, He took up our sorrows, and His wounds healed us⁵.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

The Lord Christ carried our sorrows, as we have seen Him at the garden of Gethsemane, drinking our bitter cup to the last drop, and praying to His Father, saying, “*O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.*” (Matthew 26: 42) He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee to see Him begin to be sorrowful and deeply distressed, saying to them, “*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.*” (Matthew 26: 38)

“*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us,*” (2 Corinthians 5: 21) as He offered Himself a sacrifice of sin, took up our transgressions for atonement.

“He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The

¹ *On the Son, 19.*

² *On the Good Widowhood, 23.*

³ *Oration On Easter, 2:13.*

⁴ *Oration On the Son, 20.*

⁵ *Cat. Lect. 13:34.*

chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we were healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray, we have turned everyone, to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Is. 53: 5, 6)

- ❖ The Lord delivered His body to death, to sanctify us through the forgiveness of sins, realized by the sprinkling of His blood.
We should thank the Lord from our depths, because He revealed to us things that passed; gave us wisdom concerning those at present; and did not leave us without understanding of those of the future¹.

Epistle to Barnabas

- ❖ We are purified by His precious blood from all sins; His blood which does not scream for vengeance like that of Abel (Hebrews 12: 24)².

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

- ❖ I wish we remind ourselves of the benefit of the true faith; as it is proper for me to realize that Christ has taken up my infirmities for my sake, submitted to the pains of my body; For my sake - namely for the sake of everyone - “*He became a curse for us*” (Galatians 3: 13).
For my sake He submitted and was humiliated!
He became a curse - not by His divinity but by His manhood - as it is written: “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*” (Galatians 3: 13).
He was hanged by His body; becoming a curse, He who took up our curse!
He cried, so as to spare you much crying!
What a glorious cure! For us to have the comfort of Christ!
For our sake He suffered these things with amazing patience... when we, for His name’s sake, cannot bear the normal patience!
His tears wash us, and His crying cleanses us!³

St. Ambrose

- ❖ Through His death He raised the dead as He took up the curse, to rid us from it⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Through the death of the righteous, that took place by His own will, He took away the death of sinners, which was by necessity a verdict that we deserved⁵.

¹ *Ep. To Barnabas, ch5.*

² *Pasch. Ep. 1.*

³ الحب الإلهي، ص 421-422.

⁴ الحب الإلهي، ص 423.

⁵ الحب الإلهي، ص 426.

St. Augustine

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.” (Is. 53: 7)

The prophet here uses the past tense; and as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [This is how the prophets of the old did, talking of the future, as though of the past¹.]

- ❖ Surely, the prophecy talks more clearly about Lord Jesus, as it says, ***“He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.” (Is. 53: 7)*** (Being our Passover) Your forehead was anointed by the mark of His blood, and also the two (doorposts). All Christians carry that same mark².

St. Augustine

- ❖ When Pilate debated with the religious leaders, Lord Jesus was silent, realizing what the prophet said: ***“He opened not His mouth and in His humility there was wisdom.” (Is. 53: 7, 8).***

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ It was fitting for Him to be silent during His passion; but He would not be so in His judgment, when He who, in great humility, was sentenced, comes to judge all³.
- ❖ He patiently took on Himself evil, to turn it later on into righteousness⁴.
- ❖ When He was led as a sacrifice, ***“as a sheep before His shearers,”*** He was silent; and when He was crucified and buried, He was all the time the hidden God of gods⁵.

St. Augustine

- ❖ When He was scourged He opened not His mouth! And when He was crucified He prayed for His crucifiers! How can I pay the Lord off for all what He had given me?

The Chalice of salvation I take, and call the Name of the Lord!⁶

St. Jerome

St. Augustine believes that the Lord Christ kept silent during the ordeal of His trial, in order to conceal His Deity, to let them consummate what they intended to do; But at His ultimate coming, He ***“Shall not keep silent”*** (Psalm 50: 3); as He will be proclaiming His Deity.

“And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living.

¹. In John hom 13:3.

² On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed.

³ On Ps. 38.

⁴ On Ps. 45.

⁵ On Ps. 50.

⁶ الحب الإلهي، ص 246.

For the transgression of My people He was stricken.” (Is. 53: 8)

- ❖ ***“Who will declare His generation?”*** (Is. 53: 8) He was born eternal... was timelessly, begotten from the Father; and in the fullness of time, He was born by the Virgin¹.

St. Augustine

“And they made His grave with the wicked, but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.” (Is. 53: 9)

- ❖ They crucified Him with robbers, involuntarily realizing the prophecy... What they did to insult Him has been meant to realize the strength of that great prophecy.

The devil tried hard to conceal what took place, but in vain. Three have been crucified, among whom Jesus alone was glorified, to confirm His authority on all. Miracles happened, as the three of them were nailed on their crosses, yet no one referred those miracles to the other two, but to Jesus alone, putting the plan of the devil completely to no avail. One of the two robbers was saved, he who did not say wrong to the glory of the cross, but somehow contributed to it. What happened to him that led him to Paradise is not much less than an earthquake².

St. John Chrysostom

St. Augustine believes that the prophecy, ***“They made His grave with the wicked,”*** had been realized through assigning wicked soldiers to guard the grave of the Lord Christ, who have received a bribe to falsely testify that ***“His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.”*** (Matthew 28: 13) In their false testimony, they testified to His resurrection, as, if they were sleeping, how could they know that His disciples came and stole Him away?³ They testified to the fact that His body was not anymore in the grave, but their claim that it has been stolen away was something against any logic.

“Because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Is. 53: 12)

- ❖ If it was for the sake of you and your sins that He numbered with transgressors you should keep the law for His sake. Worship Him, who was nailed on the cross for your sake, even though you are yourself nailed... Purchase your salvation by your death, and enter together with Jesus into paradise, to remember, ***“from where you have fallen”*** (Revelation 2: 5)⁴.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

¹ *On the Creed, 8.*

² *In John hom 85:1.*

³ *On Ps. 38.*

⁴ *Orat. On Easter, 34.*

❖ He intercedes for us every day, washing our feet. We likewise are in need of washing our own feet every day, through spiritually doing what is right; realizing and saying with the Lord's prayer: "*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*" (Matthew 6: 12)¹

St. Augustine

¹ *In Joan tr. 56:4.*

CHAPTER 54

AN INVITATION TO THE CHURCH TO SING

Having spoken of the redeeming passions of the Lord Christ He is now inviting the Church to a life of praise and joy; having found her heavenly Groom, who grants her spiritual fertility and an increasing fruition in place of barrenness and desolation. He lifted her up from humility to the glory of the children of God, from corruption to His heavenly righteousness, granting her a conquest over all powers of the enemy.

1. A praise for the sake of fruitfulness 1-3.
2. A praise for the heavenly Groom 4-10.
3. A praise for renovation of the Church 11-13.
4. A praise for victory of the Church 14-17.

1. A PRAISE FOR THE SAKE OF FRUITFULNESS

“Sing O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not travailed with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,’ says the Lord.” (Is. 54: 1)

Origen believes that the husband here, is the Law¹, with which the people of the Old Testament were bound, and was fitting for it to present increasing fruits. While the Gentile nations, although deprived of it, yet, uniting with the Lord Christ, through faith in Him, gave birth to children, sanctified in the Lord.

St. Augustine compares² the Church of the Old Testament to that of the New Testament. The former although married to the Law, yet became with her children in servitude, because it sought worldly blessings. The later, on the other hand worshipped God for His own sake, for Him to be All in All. Her ministry is free, referring to children of a free woman and not of a slave. After being before a barren and childless woman, she has now many children, more than the former. This status gives her joy and cause to praise.

What we say of the Church of the New Testament as a whole, we say of every soul related to her. Whatever barren and dry our past life has been, the mercy and compassion of God is capable of granting us spiritual fruits for our souls (sons), and for our bodies (daughters), through receiving the cross and enjoying the resurrection with Him.

❖ The Law came to make the people righteous, but could not. Yet the Lord Christ came to

¹ *Comm. On Matt. 10:23.*

² *Against 2 Letters of the Palagians, 3:13.*

open the way of righteousness through faith, and realized what the Law intended to do. What the Law could not realize through the letter, He Himself could do through faith¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ The Church extends right and left, and does not anymore recall the shame of her widowhood².
- ❖ She was called Jerusalem; yet the first Jerusalem refusing to listen, was told: “*Your house is left to you desolate*” (Matthew 23: 38). While that, of which it was written: “*Sing O barren, you who have not borne...*” did not despise Him who called her, who sends her rain and grants her fruits.

He called the Church from all the over world after His resurrection; not to be weak on the cross, but strong in heaven³.

- ❖ That prophecy said by Isaiah, on your tongue to your Church -your holy city, is being realized; who has been once barren and desolate, have now more children than that who got a husband, to be truly told: “*Sing, O barren, you who have not borne*” more so than the Jewish nation with a husband, through receiving the Law; and more so than that with a visible king. Your King is concealed, yet you have numerous children from that concealed Groom.

St. Augustine⁴

What are the results of this fruitfulness?

“Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your habitations; do not spare; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left; And your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited.” (Is. 54: 2, 3)

The prophet looked at the Church of the New Testament as a Tabernacle of the Lord to which innumerable multitudes come, from the right (Jews), and from the left (Gentiles), in a consistent flow. And when the place is not wide enough to accommodate them He requests the enlargement of the place of the tent, stretching its curtains wide, lengthening its cords and strengthening its stakes. It is extending to embrace the whole earth for the Lord and for His Christ. It is transforming heathen nations into sanctuaries for the Lord, and desolate cities into holy dwellings for His people.

This is a portrait of the believer who encounters the cross. He truly turns into a tent for the Lord; his heart gets wider day after day, to carry the image of the philanthropic Savior. He opens

¹ In Matt. Hom 16.

² On Ps. 89.

³ On Ps. 102.

⁴ On Ps. 59.

up His depths for the good (those from the right) and for the bad (those from the left), to embrace in love, every man to a life of fellowship with God in His Son by the Holy Spirit. It is as though the fruitful work of the cross, is pouring the Spirit of love in us, to share with the Crucified His love; to stretch the arms of our hearts to embrace all, in order to realize in us the divine words: *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (John 13: 35)

If the cross has opened up the gates of hope before all nations by divine love, our testimony to the Crucified will not be realized, as long as the tent of our hearts is narrow, its doors closed, its curtains not wide, and its stakes not strengthened. Let us then give our hearts to the Crucified, to make of them His kingdom of love, wide enough to accommodate all humanity, of continuous growth!

We often condemn others as being desolate cities, although it is more fitting for us to condemn ourselves, because we did not carry in us the love of the Crucified that makes the desolate cities inhabitable!

- ❖ It is not fitting for one to care only for himself. He should also care for others... What is the use of a lamp that does not give light to those sitting in the darkness? And what is the use of a Christian who does not bring anyone back to virtue?¹

St. John Chrysostom

2. A PRAISE FOR THE HEAVENLY GROOM

Although the cross is a *“stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the nations”* (1 Corinthians 1: 23), as far as we are concerned, as we carry its fruits, we appreciate it as *“God’s power and wisdom,”* and we are not ashamed of it. That is why the prophet says, *“Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; nor be disgrace for you will not be put to shame. For you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore.”* (Is. 54: 4)

At the Cross the soul encounters her Groom, Grantor of life and Conqueror of death. She remembers no more her past widowhood and the shame of her youth, when she lived for so long lonely and rejected, with no one to fill up the void of her heart. Looking up at the crucified Groom fulfills all her inner depths, and lets her disregard the ridicule of the daughters of Jerusalem who reject salvation. In the strength of love she says, *“I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field. Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases.”* (Songs 3: 5)

St. John Chrysostom presents us with the following conversation between the heavenly Groom and the human soul:

¹ للمؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1988، ص 211.

[How great is my dowry! He came and took me, and named my dowry, saying, I shall give you my wealth!

Have you lost the paradise? I shall give it back to you...

Yet, He did not give me my whole dowry back here; why? To grant it to you, when you enter the Royal premises.

Was it you who came to me? No, but I did... not to let you stay where you are, but to take you back with me. So, do not claim your dowry while you are still in this life, but be filled with hope and faith¹.]

This is the mystery of our joy, and the object of our persistent praise. The cross has turned our widowhood into a unique wedding in which we unite with the Lord Himself. ***“For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name. And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. He is called the God of the whole earth. For the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused,’ says your Lord.”*** (Is. 54: 5, 6)

We were in shame and disgrace, like a wife who was deserted by her husband, because of her adultery and uncleanness; but here she became a bride of the Lord of hosts, of the Holy One of Israel, God of all the earth Jesus Christ. As she encounters her Groom, and enjoys His glories, she remembers no more the time of her widowhood with all its bitterness, and counts her whole past as not more than a moment or a blink of eye. The grace of the Lord of glory, and our unity with His Father, make us comprehend with joy His words: ***“For a mere moment I have forsaken you. But with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment. But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,’ says the Lord, your Redeemer.”*** (Is. 54: 7, 8)

Before God’s everlasting compassion we count all days of our affliction as though a brief moment that passed to let us enter the heavenly glories. As to His saying, *“I will gather you,”* that means gathering the holy Church together from all nations, peoples, and tongues, as one body for the head, or as one bride for her heavenly Groom. In it also, believers gather together, those of the Old and those of the New Testaments; the heavenly hosts with the men; and the priests with the congregation etc. Yet all that would not be realized, unless man gets together with himself as a whole: the soul submitting with the body, with all its senses and feelings, the mind with the heart and faculties etc., to become in his wholeness sanctified to the Lord.

That matrimonial love between Christ and the human soul, is everlasting and unending. Thus as God swore to Noah that He will never again, in His anger, cover the earth with flood (Is. 54: 9); so He likewise presents us with a promise, never to desert us or deprive us of His

¹ للمؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1988، ص 215.

compassion, saying,

“For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed. But My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,’ says the Lord, who has mercy on you.” (Is. 54: 10)

In short, He elected us a bride, taking away the shame of our widowhood, confirming His love and compassion for us, presenting us with sure, renewable, and everlasting promises. He brought us out of the house of adultery, cleansed, and sanctified us as His bride, to enter into His heaven, and to sit as a queen on His right. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [God, having elected a whore, He does not take her into His heaven in such condition, but because she is incapable of ascending up, He descended to earth, came to that harlot, and did not hesitate to hold her in her drunken condition¹.]

3. A PRAISE FOR THE RENOVATION OF THE CHURCH

The cause of our praise is that, having been like barren, God granted us many children, and like deserted we found in Him a Groom for our souls, and like an afflicted city God took over its renovation: **“O 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.” (Is. 54: 11, 12)**

What a fabulous portrait that reveals the extent of corruption that humanity reached, then the unutterable exalted glory it was granted. As a desolate devastated city, it was humiliated through the enemy who captivated its people, and deprived them of all hope, leaving them un comforted. But now God is rebuilding it in the following way:

a. Building it with stones of turquoise, a sign of strength and sturdiness. These stones are the souls that received faith in the Savior, turning into living stones in the temple of the Lord, that the devil cannot break or take away.

b. The foundation with blue sapphires. The foundation is our Lord Jesus Christ (the Heavenly-blue); the Corner Stone who binds all together in Him.

c. The battlements of transparent rubies, a reference to the inner glory of the believer, set upon Christ’s righteousness and the holy life in Him, which is reflected on the outside battlements.

d. The gates of sparkling jewels; referring to sanctification of senses, caring, without destroying or disregarding them.

¹ للمؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1988، ص 213.

e. All the walls of precious stones, referring to complete sanctification of the soul and body.

f. **“All (its) children are taught by the Lord” (Is. 54: 13).** The loyal members of the Church will be taught by the Lord Himself, every priest or teacher will vanish before their eyes, to see only the Lord Himself working in all. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [Behold the dignity of faith, they will not be taught by a human, but by God Himself... Yet, the word ‘all’ in the prophecy here does not mean, that ‘all’ inhabitants will be taught by the Lord, but all those who have the will to learn. The teacher sits there ready to give all his knowledge to everybody¹.]

St. Augustine says about the grace of being taught through God: [This grace is called ‘teaching,’ as God teaches those He calls according to His will, granting them whatever they need to know, and at the same time to apply whatever they are taught².] It is a divine gift that carries two integrated aspects: The true spiritual Gnosis, and the enjoyment of applying it in our daily life. He grants us to know the truth and to live it in Him!

Through this education, the children of the Church enjoy exalted peace: **“Great will be the peace of your children.” (Is. 54: 13)** By sitting at the Savior’s feet hearkening His voice and experiencing truth in Him, we are granted the inner peace of spirit, as a special gift for His children.

St. Athanasius described **St. Anthony** after spending a long period of his severe asceticism, saying, [His physical appearance did not change... nor his attitude; his soul was not afflicted by grief, indulged in lust, or affected by laughing or despair³.]

❖ Peace is the inheritance, the Lord promised His disciples before His crucifixion; saying, **“Peace I give you.”** Whoever wishes to inherit the Lord Christ let him dwell in Christ’s peace⁴.

St. Augustine

g. The mystery of peace of the Church, its edification, and strength, is the righteousness of Christ, saying, **“In righteousness you shall be established. You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear, and from terror, for it shall not come near you.” (Is. 54: 14)** The apostle says, **“Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4: 25).**

4. A PRAISE FOR THE VICTORY OF THE CHURCH

What makes the heart of the Church rejoice - that Church, built by the Lord Himself,

¹ In John hom 46:1.

² On the Grace of Christ 13.

³ Vita Antonii 14.

⁴ الحب الإلهي، ص 960.

elected to be His bride, and a heavenly queen; teaching its children and granting them His peace; offering them His righteousness; working in them to live by righteousness and to reject all evil and oppression - is that it is, at the same time, faced by opposition from all powers of darkness; yet granted by the Lord victory over them, and conquest even over death.

a. The powers of darkness unite together against her: ***“Indeed they shall surely assemble, but not because of Me.” (Is. 54: 15)*** They assemble, counsel, and work together against the Church of Christ, as did the forces of evil before, when they requested the crucifixion of her Groom, to have their deed turn into salvation for the whole world: God *“out of the eater gave something to eat, and out of the strong gave something sweet.”*

b. Their unity led them to fall under the feet of the Church: ***“Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake.” (Is. 54: 15)***

c. Their gathering together is allowed by God: ***“I have created the spoiler to destroy.” (Is. 54: 16)*** So we should not fear him or become disturbed by his violence; he is completely controlled by God’s hand.

d. Every opposition will defiantly come to an end; the Church will be crowned, to be granted as a heritage, the eternal righteousness: ***“No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment, you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me,’ says the Lord.” (Is. 54: 17)***

CHAPTER 55

A COLLECTIVE INVITATION FOR SALVATION

God revealed His work in the Church that He transformed from a state of widowhood, into one of everlasting wedding, and from ruins to the precious exalting beautiful city of the Lord. Now, God is opening its gates wide to all, to come to the fountain of living water, to drink and quench their thirst; to find food that fulfills the needs of everyone; and to enter into a new eternal covenant. Before this invitation, it is fitting for the thirsty to proclaim their response, practically through seeking the Lord, rejecting evil, together with complete deliverance into the hands of the Savior, with joy of heart and praise.

- 1. An invitation to salvation** **1-5.**
- 2. Response of man** **6-13.**

1. AN INVITATION TO SALVATION

The divine invitation to enjoy God's free salvation came carrying the following aspects:

a. A collective invitation to the thirsty: ***“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Yes, Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (Is. 55: 1)*** It is a general invitation to all; the gates of the Church are open before all; to which, all who feel the need (the thirsty), will listen; as the Lord also said: ***“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”*** (Matthew 5: 6)

As we often said before, water in the Holy Scripture sometimes refers to the Holy Spirit that works in the water of Baptism. It is as though, the invitation here is directed to all, to freely enjoy Baptism.

St. Gregory Nazianzus speaks about the gift of Baptism saying, [Do not hesitate, however long the trip is, either by land or by sea; or whatever few or many the obstacles are; as long as the gift is offered to you. Isaiah is proclaiming: ***“Come, everyone who thirst...”*** How swift is God's compassion! How easy is the covenant! You will be granted this blessing, as soon as you want it. He is accepting your wish as a great price; He thirsts for your thirst, and satisfies all who wish in mystery... He offers compassion to everyone who asks for it... He is ready to give in abundance... He rejoices in giving more than those who get]¹.

b. A gift that fulfills all: This free gift, that is not purchased by gold or silver, provides everyone with his needs; the mature will get the wine in which they rejoice, and the infants will

¹ On Holy Baptism 28.

get the milk to support them.

The spiritual wine enjoyed by the mature, refers to the state of joy enjoyed by those of high spiritual stature, “*their soul delights itself in abundance of the Lord*” (Is, 55: 2); and as **St. John Saba** says, [Blessed is he, who always thinks of You in his heart; his soul is always drunk by Your sweetness.]

The spiritual milk offered to the young, refers to God’s compassion towards the beginners, giving them what fits their spiritual stomach, until they grow and mature. He knows how to offer to every one what is good for his edification, peace, and satisfaction.

❖ Do you want satisfaction? How can you have it?

The body yearns to satisfaction, yet to become hungry again after digestion, that is why the Lord Christ says, “*Whoever drinks from this water will thirst again.*” (John 4: 13)

I wish we hunger and thirst for righteousness, to get our satisfaction. I wish our inner man hunger and thirst, to get the food and drink suitable for him.

The Lord says, “*I am the Bread which came down from heaven.*” (John 6: 41) This is the Bread for the hungry. I wish we thirst for the live water: “*For with you is the fountain of life.*” (Psalm 36: 9)¹

❖ Blessed is he, who forgot all about world talk through talking with You, as with You all his needs are consummated.

You put the Spirit of your Son in his heart; and that Spirit gave him the privilege to ask of you all what you have, exactly as a son asks his father! His talk is with You all the time, as he knows no other father!²

St. John Saba

❖ Oh! I shall not get fulfilled, unless Your glory is transfigured before me!

Whoever possesses You, will have all his needs fulfilled!

How horrible is my misery! My heart tends to escape from You! From the true wealth and the true joy, to go after the world, where there is nothing but sorrow and pain!³

St. Augustine

❖ I wish they feel their need to be worthy of satisfaction; as while displaying their haughtiness, they deprive themselves of the bread that would grant them a healthy life!

Seek the Lord, you needy, hungry, and thirsty, “*For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*” (John 6: 33. 51).

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 45-46.

² الحب الإلهي، ص 51.

³ الحب الإلهي، ص 46-47.

Seek the Lord to live. You seek the bread for your flesh to live, while the Lord seeks you for your souls to live!¹

❖ *“His eyes are darker than wine; and his teeth whiter than milk.”* (Genesis 49: 12).

His eyes are darker than wine; these are His spiritual people who are drunk with His cup; and His teeth are whiter than milk, which are the words on which the infants, still unable to receive solid food, feed (1 Corinthians 3: 2; 1 Peter 2: 2)².

❖ Get drunk, yet beware of the source: If you are drinking out of the splendid cup of the Lord, this would show through your deeds, your love for righteousness, and finally through the departure of your mind away from the earthlies to the heavenlies³.

St. Augustine

Let us then approach our Christ to purchase His wine and milk for free, according to His promise and invitation.

c. Entrance into an everlasting covenant to establish the fallen kingdom of David, according to the true divine promise: ***“I will make an everlasting covenant with you - the sure mercies of David”*** (Is. 55: 3) Through that covenant we become kings (Revelation 5: 10), referred to the King of kings, of whom is said: ***“I have given Him as a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples”*** (Is. 55: 4) He is the King, who set the law of the New Testament and the New commandment, not to a certain people in particular, but to all peoples.

d. Receiving the heathen nations that returned to God in faith: ***“Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God and the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified you.”*** (Is. 55: 5)

This issue was not well received by the ancient people; even after the door was opened before the Gentiles. The Church in the whole world, remained in awe before God’s love for the whole humanity, drawing them from paganism and its defilement, to proclaim the glory of God. In awe, **St. Augustine** says, [How did the Gentiles enter so quickly into faith?... If we ask them what they want, they would answer: ‘a knowledge of the glory of God’⁴.]

2. RESPONSE OF MAN

Before this holy, free, and general invitation to the thirsty, it is fitting for man to respond to it, and receive it through the following means:

a. Through prayers, namely seeking to encounter the Lord: ***“Seek the Lord while He may***

¹ On Ps. 70.

² City of God 16:41

³ On Ps. 104.

⁴ On Ps. 135.

be found. Call upon Him while He is near.” (Is. 55: 6)

God loved us first, descended to us to proclaim that He is not far from us, but standing at the doors of our hearts, knocking and seeking entrance (Revelation 3: 20). It is fitting for us to seek Him and ask Him to take over the keys of our hearts, in order to open and enter then to close, to let none else share our hearts with Him, being the One who “*opens and no one closes, and closes and no one opens.*”

Proclamation of our acceptance of God’s love through prayer is responding to love with love; and proclamation of the soul’s acceptance of her unique Groom, who eternally asks for her hand.

b. Through repentance: ***“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” (Is. 55: 7)***

What does repentance mean, but proclaiming the acceptance of light and not darkness, Christ and not Belial (2 Corinthians 6: 14)? Repentance is the way that John the Baptist paved for the Lord Christ, and that which the disciples preached to prepare humanity to receive His Kingdom within them.

c. Through leaning upon God’s wisdom, and trusting in His plans and ordinances for us, saying, ***“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Is. 55: 8, 9)***

Our faith in the heavenly Groom implies an absolute trust in His wisdom, and love, and in His capability to plan for His bride, for her edification and salvation, however severe His plans might look, and however bitter His ordinances might seem.

d. Through quenching our thirst with the word of God, Grantor of fruits: ***“For as rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Is. 55: 10, 11)***

The Word of God was incarnated to quench the thirst of humanity with His blood, as a unique rain capable of renewing its creation, of transforming it from being a desolate wilderness inhabited by wild beasts into a fruitful paradise, dwelt by the Holy Trinity, and rejoiced by both the heavenlies and the earthlies. So it is fitting for us to receive the written word of God, not for the sake of a mere mental study, but as a life that gives divine fruits.

e. Through continuous praise, a sign of hearty acceptance of the Groom, and an inner response to Him: ***“You will go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and hills***

shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands”
(Is. 55: 12)

Going out with joy means the departure of the soul from the ego to get it wide enough to accommodate her Groom and His entire beloved, the heavenlies and the earthlies, to go, then to come back with all, in peace and reconciliation with God, angels, and humans. This extended love creates an atmosphere of joy, in which mountains and hills will burst into song, namely the congregation of believers around you, who are beholding the eternal wedding set within you. As to the trees of the field that clap their hands, this means that the joy will not be just by the tongue, but will be proclaimed through action by hands.

f. Through positive and increasing fruition: It would not be enough to take away the thorn-bush and briars, but pine-trees and myrtle have to appear, a sign of getting sealed by the name of the Lord, Grantor of spiritual fruits. In other words, our acceptance of His invitation does not imply just forsaking evil, but practicing the righteousness of Christ, and living His holy fruitful life, through the work of His Holy Spirit in us.

CHAPTER 56

A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS

God extended a general invitation to enjoy the free salvation, proclaiming the commitment of man to respond practically to that invitation. Now God is presenting His Church, as a house, open for all nations. Nobody should consider himself a foreigner, namely a descendant of pagan worshippers, but as chosen for the service and worship of the Lord; and nobody should count himself a eunuch, namely a dry tree, but a pillar in the house of the Lord.

God has no favoritism. He opens His house before all; foreigners who receive faith will come to Him, while those who got the law and prophecies, then denied Him, will be deprived of Him.

1. A house of prayer for all nations **1-8.**

2. Rejection of deniers of faith **9-12.**

1. A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS

In the previous chapter the invitation was for all the thirsty (Is. 55: 1); for the Jews and the Gentiles, for the thirsty and the hungry; for the blind and the deaf, etc. to quench their thirst from the fountains of the gospel of free salvation, and from the gift of the Spirit presented to the Church of the New Testament. Now, fearing that someone may abstain, counting himself a foreigner, having been born to a pagan family that used to deny faith, or because he is a eunuch by nature, namely a dry tree, He is encouraging everyone to enter through the wide gates of God's mercy.

a. God's salvation is close at hand: "*My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed.*" (Is. 56: 1) At that Time only seven centuries remained until the coming of the Lord Christ, Savior of the world. But a thousand years in God's sight are like one day (Psalm 90: 4). However, what's more important is that the Lord's Salvation is near every one of us, the word is within the heart, and the cross of the Lord could be proclaimed in every soul. And as **St. Augustine** says, [Foolishly, I was seeking You outside. When actually You were deep inside, deeper than my depth, and higher than my height.]

The road to our salvation is deep inside us, as we are given the Holy Spirit of God, and the fellowship in the body of the Lord Christ, through Baptism... becoming a dwelling place and a temple of God. That is why the apostle says, "*The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart.*" (Romans 10: 8)

When **St. Ephram the Syrian** speaks about the birth of Jesus the Lord of glory, he draws

our attention toward our inner man, where the Lord came to dwell in our hearts through faith (Ephesians 3: 17).

- ❖ Let every man adorn the doors of his heart in this feast, as the Holy Spirit yearns to enter and to dwell in the heart to sanctify it. He's searching all around to seek where to enter.

Let the doors of the heart in this feast rejoice together with those of the Church, in order that the Holy Lord rejoices in His Holy temple, the babes' mouths rejoice in praise, and the Mighty Christ rejoices in His feast¹.

St. Ephram the Syrian

b. ***“Keep rejoice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.” (Is. 56: 1)***

By saying that He reveals the concept of virtue. We are committed to maintain justice and to do what is right; namely to keep the divine commandment, which is justice and right. These are a difficult task, or let us say an impossible one, according to human nature in itself. Yet, if salvation and Christ's righteousness are proclaimed in the heart, the commandment becomes easy and possible, even natural and sweet; as it is God, dwelling and working with His Holy Spirit in us, who consummate it.

Virtue, according to **St. John Cassian**: [is that through which we present the kingdom of the heart to Christ².]

We deliver our heart to Him, to work in it, to transform us into His likeness and image. **Origen** says that we are created according to Christ's image; that is why virtues, in his opinion, is for us to become one with Him. It is He Himself, who is the virtues we possess³. He is Justice, Wisdom, and Truth at the same time. That is why, he, who truly practices these virtues, will be a true partaker of the divine nature⁴.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus says, [Being Love and Peace, God, through these names, persuades us to shape ourselves according to these virtues, that are His features⁵.]

Virtue is the work of God in His believers, the receivers of His invitation, and the responsiveness to His love:

- ❖ Don't you notice that there is nothing we do without Christ?⁶

¹ *Hymns on Nativity 4.*

² *Collationes 1:13.*

³ *Fragm. In Joan 1X.*

⁴ See *Henri Crouzel: Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène. Paris 1956, p. 239 ff. [See T. Spidik: The Spirituality of the Christian East, p. 291].*

⁵ *Carminum Liber 1.11.9, r 19ff; PG. 37:668. [See T. Spidik, p. 291].*

⁶ *In Eph. Hom 1.*

- ❖ That we cannot walk along the way of God, unless we are carried over the wings of the Spirit¹.
- ❖ That there is no one stronger than him who enjoys the heavenly help; and no one weaker than him who is deprived of it².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ God is Holy, and makes holy; Righteous, and makes righteous³.

St. Augustine

c. This divine gift is free, yet is not granted against will or to idles, but to those responsive: ***“Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it, who keep from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.” (Is. 56: 2)***

If God has granted us His resurrection or risen life, “a Sabbath,” namely a rest for our souls, it is fitting for us to live this life and keep it, and not to live the corruption of death; to keep our hand from doing any evil, so as not to submit to the death of sin, but to be in the Lord, our true Sabbath.

Our true Sabbath is our Lord Jesus, the Victim and the Risen from the dead; in whom the Father finds His rest (His Sabbath), as far as we are concerned, as in Him we are justified and counted as His children; and in Him we find our rest, finding in Him a place in the Father’s bosom.

- ❖ We, personally, would turn into the seventh day (a Sabbath), when we become filled with God’s blessings and holiness⁴.

St. Augustine

d. Transforming foreigners into children of the house of the Lord: ***“Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, ‘The Lord has utterly separated me from His people.’” (Is. 56: 3)*** They will enjoy God’s covenant, the right to worship and to serve the Lord’s house. ***“Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants... everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and who holds fast My covenant.” (Is. 56: 6)***

What does it mean, to receive foreigners as children of the Lord’s house, and to hold fast His covenant? It is the enjoyment of unity with the Lord Christ, to enter into heavenly sanctuaries without hindrance, as children sanctified in Him, and as members of His body, who have the

¹ In Matt., In Gen. PG. 57:30; 53:228.

² In Paralyt. PG. 51:51.

³ City of God 17:4.

⁴ City of God, 22:30.

right to be united with the Father by the Holy Spirit, through the blood of the covenant, the atoning blood of the Lord Christ.

Opening the door of salvation before foreigners to become children of God, who have the right of worship and ministry, provide hope to all; and as **St. Hippolytus** says,

[The ‘Word’ shows His compassion together with impartiality... He loves to instruct the ignorant, and to put him who is at fault, back on the right track.

So easily, those who live in faith, who have the pure eye and the holy heart, will find him; those who wish to knock on the door He will open promptly.

He would never dismiss any of His ministers, as unworthy of the divine sacraments.

He would never prefer the rich to the poor; and would never despise the poor because of his poverty.

He doesn’t despise the barbarian, and would never reject a eunuch as though he is not a real man (Is. 56: 3, 4).

He would never hate females on account of their initial rebellion (Eve); nor reject a male, on account of his disobedience of the man (Adam).

He seeks all, and wishes for the salvation of all, yearns to turn all into children of God, calling all saints as one perfect man¹.]

e. He grants children to the eunuch: **“Let no eunuch say, ‘Her I am, a dry tree.’” (Is. 56: 3)** Eunuchs were not allowed into priesthood (Leviticus 21: 20), or to partake of feasts (Deuteronomy 23: 1). Now, as the gates of God’s mercies have been wide open, there are no more spiritual eunuchs in the Church, *“None is barren among them”* (Song 4: 2)... All witness to God, and bear Him children. Our encounter with the Lord does not stop at our right to enter His house, and enjoy His covenant, but grants us the strength to witness to Him, and have fruitfulness. God promised His people if they obey: *“You shall be blessed above all people; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock.”* (Deuteronomy 7: 14)

f. He would make of believers heroes, everlastingly memorable, even in heaven: **“To them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name; better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.” (Is. 56: 5)** How amazing! The Lord came to us incarnate, to die on our land, then rose to lift us up to His heavenly house, to become everlasting, not even death can destroy us; to have our names eternally inscribed in God’s book, and on the palm of His hand.

The mystery of the eternity of our names in the heavenly divine house is our union with the Lord Christ, our being the living stones set on the chief Cornerstone: *“As living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to*

¹ *Treat. On Christ and Antichrist, 3.*

God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ (1 Peter 2: 5, 6)

g. Enjoyment of worship, joyful to us, and pleasurable to the Lord: ***“Even them I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (Is. 56: 7)***

What does this mean, but our enjoyment of worship, not as a formal commitment, or mere appearances, but as a joyful exaltation on the holy mountain of the Lord, and joy in His heavenly house; as a house of prayer, where we present our life a burnt offering of love, and a holy sacrifice in union with that of the Holy Christ; through which we rejoice, and be acceptable to the Father, because it bears the fragrance of Christ of whom God rejoices.

Tertullian says, [This sacrifice comes out of every heart, nourishes on faith, and keeps truth; enters in innocence and purity, adorned with love. We should guard it with the greatness of good deeds; presenting psalms and praises on the altar of God, to earn everything from Him¹.]

h. Opening of the house of the Lord before all nations, including the exiled Israelite. Exiles here probably mean as well, the return of the fallen among Christians (the New Israel). The gates of the house of the Lord are open to all, even to those believers who have fallen or gone astray, who were rejected by some heretics. **St. Cyprian** authored two magnificent books dealing with this issue, under the title ***“Repentance.”***

Thus, this chapter presents us with a living portrait of the Church of the New Testament. **It is a house of prayer**, where people encounter, and have living fellowship with God who is close at hand, dwelling in us (Is. 56: 1). **It is the dwelling place of Truth and Justice**, as long as we unite with our righteous Christ, who justifies the sinners, offers Himself to them as Truth, Justice, righteousness, and Love (Is. 56: 1). A feature of this house is **sanctification of the freewill**; its gates being open before all, with no exception, nor obligation or commitment (Is. 56: 2, 3); whoever enters it is no longer a foreigner, but becomes of the household of the Lord; but who prefers to stay outside, will not be forced to get in. Inside that house, all will be like fruitful trees that know no dryness (Is. 56: 3), as it is the house of the Lord and his fruitful paradise. Whoever dwells in it, lives eternally with his Savior in His glories, to have his name inscribed in heaven, and a memorial that cannot be destroyed (Is. 5: 5). Within, there are an everlasting undisturbed joy, and a holy, exalted, angelic worship (Is. 56: 7). Lastly, it is the house of mercy; whoever is outside it will still have the gates always open before him; the Lord’s bosom will always be waiting for his return.

¹ *On Prayer*, 28.

2. REJECTION OF THE DENIERS OF FAITH

If the house of the Lord is open before all, even to fallen believers, whatever their fall is, yet, re-entering it has to be through “*repentance*.” Who remains in his denial, would stay outside, prone to attacks of wild beasts in the outer wilderness, he chooses for himself.

The prophet looks at those deniers of faith, to see their watchmen all blind, with no spiritual knowledge (Is. 56: 10). Deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit the Grantor of enlightenment, they turned into mute dogs that cannot bark; unable of uttering even a word of edification for the sake of salvation of their flock; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep (Is. 56: 10). Their shepherds are like dogs that eat but do not bark; all turn to their own way, each seek his own gain that is, they are greedy and do not comprehend the pastoral self-giving love (Is. 56: 11). They get drunk, and have fun, even invite others to join them, thinking that their wasteful life would not only last, but would even get better (Is. 56: 12).

This is a picture of Pastoral care void of true Divine Love.

While God, at the beginning of this chapter, opens His spiritual house before all nations with no discrimination, inviting foreigners to approach and unite with Him, to gain fellowship of His eternal glories, and seeking even the fallen to return and enjoy His love, yet He is faced with selfishness of some shepherds who confined themselves in their shell of “ego,” to close the gates of God’s mercy before people, seeking what is for their temporary gain, on the expense of the salvation of others.

CHAPTER 57

DEFILEMENTS AS OBSTACLES TO SALVATION

Having spoken of the free invitation of God to all thirsty to quench their thirst from the fountains of salvation; of the opening of the house of God for the joyful heavenly worship, to spare anyone feeling foreign or barren - He presents in chapters 57 to 59 obstacles to the enjoyment of God's work of salvation, and to entering the house of the Lord.

In the present chapter He concentrates on defilements or spiritual adultery as an obstacle; opening the doors of hope before those who return to Him.

- 1. Death of the righteous 1-2.**
- 2. Condemnation of the wicked 3-13.**
- 3. Blessings of the return to God 14-21.**

1. DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

“The righteous perishes and man takes it to his heart. Merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace. They shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.” (Is. 57: 1, 2)

The prophet speaks of what is going to happen to the children of God along the ages, falling under several afflictions for no reason; wounded like their Savior, even *“in the house of their friends”* (Zechariah 13: 6); and *“their foes are those of their own household”* (Matthew 10: 36). But here, he speaks more so, of the time of king Manasseh, who shed much innocent blood (2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33) to the extent that the righteous yearned to die, counting death as comfort, compared to what they were suffering. That also clearly applies, more to the days of the ‘lawless one’ or the antichrist, when ‘the man of sin’ will sit as God in the temple of God, and will persecute the Church (2 Thessalonians 2: 4); so that it is said: *“Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war against him?”* (Revelation 13: 4) *“It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation... Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”* (Revelation 13: 7, 10)

Before that bitterness it would be said that the righteous is taken away from the face of evil. (Is. 57: 2)

As the righteous perishes or gets persecuted and killed, and no one ponders it in his heart; the wicked lead a life of fun like kids; while their elders and caretakers perish, and no one understands. But the righteous rejoice in death, counting it as sparing their souls from that ugly evil atmosphere.

❖ [In a message to a young widow **St. John Chrysostom** writes]

Indeed, if he perished and his life came utterly to an end, it would have been a great sorrowful tragedy. But if he sailed on to a peaceful shore, to the Lord to whom he actually belongs, we should not become sad, but should rejoice, as this is not really death, but a sort of a move from worse to better, from earth to heaven, from among humans to the company of angels and archangels, even to be with God, Lord of the angels and archangels... Now, he is secure and in great peace!

- ❖ If your husband has been, like those, leading a shameful life that displeases the Lord, it would be fitting for you to cry and wail, not only on the day of his death, but even while he was still alive. But, having been a friend of God, we should rejoice in either way. Listen to what the apostle says, *“I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”* (Philippians 1: 23)¹

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ What a great benefit for us to depart from this world! As the disciples felt sorrow when Christ, the Teacher of our salvation, and of our good deeds, told them that He is going away, He said to them: *“If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father’*” (John 14: 28), teaching us to rejoice when one of our beloved departs from this world; recalling the words of the blessed apostle Paul: *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* (Philippians 1: 21) Through death we forsake all painful troubles, and get rid of the poisonous fangs of the devil, to receive Christ’s invitation for us, rejoicing in the eternal salvation².
- ❖ He who anticipates after his death another death fears death³.
- ❖ Through death, the children of God get away from unbearable afflictions, gaining happiness as a reward for their patience and innocence⁴.

Cyprian the Martyr

St. Augustine believes that what came here concerning the death of the righteous, having *“no one ponders in his heart,”* refers to the Lord Christ, whom the wicked intended Him to perish through crucifixion, not knowing that He Himself, allowed that to happen; and as the apostle Paul says, *“Had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”* (1 Corinthians 2: 8)⁵.

¹ للمؤلف: رسالة إلى أرملة شابة، للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم.

² الحب الإلهي، ص 519.

³ الحب الإلهي، ص 521.

⁴ الحب الإلهي، ص 526.

⁵ On Ps. 82.

2. CONDEMNATION OF THE WICKED

The righteous suffer from the wicked. Yet what could the latter do to them? For them even death is a divine gift, through which they cross over from their gloomy atmosphere, to join the joyful Groom of their souls. The wicked, on the other hand, are summoned by the Lord to a tribunal, through which the following will take place:

a. The wicked are called by several titles, among which:

* **'Sons of sorceress'**: The whole nation rejected the true words of prophets, and resorted to magic and sorcery, to seek counsel and to reveal the future. That is counted as a rejection of attribution to God, and an acceptance of sonship to the devil and his wicked deeds. So the wicked are called **'Children of transgression, offspring of falsehood.'** (Is. 57: 4)

* **'Sons of adulterers and prostitutes'** (Is. 57: 3): having no relation to righteous life, neither through the father nor through the mother; the father being an adulterer, and the mother a prostitute; corruption came to all: men and women.

They boasted, claiming that God is their father, and that Zion is their mother; yet their defilement revealed their actual descent. They forsook reference to God and His Church, to be referred to the devil and his kingdom. The evangelist says, *"They said to Him, 'We were not born of fornication; we have one Father...God.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me... You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning... a liar and the father of it.'"* (John 8: 41 - 44)

* **Brood of rebels**, having rejected obedience to God, and response to His prophetic proclamations and commandments.

* **Offspring of liars**, tending to deal with their transgressions by lies and deceit, instead of openness and clarity.

b. Being involved in idolatry, strongly preoccupied with setting idols, burning with lust among the oaks and under every spreading tree; sacrificing their children for the Baal in the ravines and under the overhanging crags (Is. 57: 5). That horrible portrait, in which humans proclaimed their denial of God and their children is still going on in a way or another, up to this day. Instead of giving Him thanks for His gifts (the green trees), we, sometimes, present our hearts aflame with evil to the devil's and his kingdom's account, as defiled burnt offerings set in hearts; and instead of caring for our inner life, to enjoy spiritual fruits for the soul and the body - namely to beget, in our hearts, sons and daughters, to praise God, we present the energies of the soul and body, as human sacrifices, to the account of the evil one.

c. Practicing evil in ravines (Is. 57: 6); on high and lofty hills (Is. 57: 7; behind doors and doorposts (Is. 57: 8)... as though evil is not bound to either place or circumstances, but to the

heart that deviated from its Creator, and sought independence from Him. He probably wanted likewise to confirm that the wicked shamelessly commit evil openly as well as in secret; in public places, as well as in their homes.

d. He likens the wicked to an adulteress who is never fulfilled of evil, but opened her bed wide (Is. 57: 8), made a pact with anyone, instead of making an eternal pact with God, as the sole Groom of her soul. She loved the wicked, not for their own sake, but to go to bed with them, to fulfill her bodily lust (Is. 57: 8).

e. She offered *memorabilia* figures and statues to her partners in evil. Instead of repentance she shows pride in evil. He probably means by '*memorabilia*' setting pagan symbols as spiritual adultery, and binding with foreign gods in place of God, her Groom; or on account that adultery has amalgamated with idolatry in her life.

f. She anointed herself with olive oil, increased her perfume, and sent ambassadors far away to the king, seeking to commit evil with him, so descended to the abyss (Is. 57: 9). He probably meant by the king here, Pharaoh, whom they sought to rescue them from Assyria; something that God counted as spiritual adultery, being as leaning upon human arm, in place of trusting in God.

Sending ambassadors to the king refers to binding with authority, as what would happen in the days of the antichrist, when the deviated religious work amalgamates with contemporary authority; when the resistance against the Church, beside using violence, becomes through blaspheme as well.

g. She sought evil with great zeal, and by several travels, until she got wearied, but never despaired; as through her lust, she did neither faint nor lost strength (Is. 57: 10).

h. She committed evil, not dreading nor fearing God, her Groom. She neither responds to His warnings (Is. 57: 11) nor to His encouragements, through revealing her righteousness and good works (Is. 57: 12).

i. Leaning upon her lovers and admirers who would be carried together with her, by the wind, and blown away by a breath.

By lovers, He probably meant her collection of pagan idols, to which she cried for help, but in vain, as the wind will carry all of them off, a mere breath would blow them away.

3. BLESSINGS OF THE RETURN TO GOD

Despite what they have committed of corruption and spiritual adultery, yet God waits for their return to Him with repentance, to grant them the following blessings:

a. To inherit the earth, as a way by which to cross over to eternal inheritance. And as the

Lord says, “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5: 5); and according to the Psalm: “*For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth*” (Psalm 37: 9)’

“*But he who puts his trust in Me shall possess the land and shall inherit the holy mountain. And one shall say, ‘Heap it up! Heap it up! Prepare the way’*” (Is. 57: 13, 14) If the land (earth) here refers to Canaan, and God’s holy mountain to Zion, repentance grants man an enjoyment of divine blessings in this world, as a pledge of the heavenly Jerusalem.

St. John Chrysostom believes¹ that God promised us a heavenly dowry: “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man.*” (1 Corinthians 2: 9)

[As a dowry, he designated the following: eternity, angelic praise, getting rid of death, setting free of sin, inheritance of the kingdom with its great wealth of righteousness, sanctification, salvation from present evils, discovery of future blessings. Great is my dowry! The engagement gifts are present blessings that let us yearn for the future ones. But the complete dowry will be given in the coming life.]

If the land refers to body, the pledge that we get here would be our reign over the body, namely to have authority over it, to live sanctified in the body, by the Spirit of God dwelling in us.

By saying, “*Build up, build up, prepare the road*” (Is. 57: 14) *He* means acceptance of Christ our Savior, being the “Way,” by Him and in Him we enjoy eternal inheritance.

b. Taking “*the stumbling block out of the way of My people.*” (Is. 57: 14)

c. Living in their midst, counting them as God’s “*high and holy mountain.*” (Is. 57: 15) As much as they are humble in their own eyes, God will lift them up and count them as worthy of His dwelling with them, saying, “*I dwell... with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*” (Is. 57: 15)

❖ He is far away from the proud, close to the lowly. “*Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly*” (Psalm 138: 6). The proud should not think that they are invisible, “*but the proud He knows from afar.*” (Psalm 138: 6) He saw the arrogant Pharisee from afar; but was close to the tax-collector to help him, because he confessed his sins (Luke 18: 9 - 14)².

St. Augustine

❖ The vehicle of pride, even if accompanied by righteousness, fast, and tithe giving, will not go far. But that of the lowly in spirit, even if accompanied by sin, yet it will get ahead of the horse of the Pharisee, no matter poor the rider be.

¹ للمؤلف: الكنيسة تحبك، للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، 1968، ص 61 الخ.

² On Ps. 40.

St. John Chrysostom¹

d. The wicked offend God as a Chastiser. Yet, being the Creator of souls, He desires their salvation. That is why He **“would not contend forever, nor would always be angry”** (Is. 57: 16), but desires that all may return to Him, to get healed of every weakness, and to be granted His comfort. And as **St. Augustine** said the troubles that we suffer here, are the results of God’s anger, because of our sins, until we repent.²

God, who created human souls, would never forsake them, but yearns and works toward their salvation; He goes on saying,

“For the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him. I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him. I will also lead him, and restore comfort to him and to his mourners.” (Is. 57: 17, 18)

God, in His love, hides and gets angry, and strikes His children for some time. By hiding, here, He probably means that He cannot bear to see His children’s sufferings afflictions. He would seem as though striking His children, then hiding for a moment, to attract their attention through trouble. That is why He confirms that, His eyes are on the ways of those He chastises, until they are healed, to lead them, and to make it up for their mourning, with divine comfort and exalted love!

- ❖ If you suffer from evil bear it nicely; then all evils will be taken away from you³.
- ❖ Such is the compassionate love of God; He would not disregard genuine repentance. Even though man may keep on, in his willful ways until the end, if he chooses to return to life of virtue, God will receive and welcome him, and will do all what is good for him, and restore him to his original condition⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

e. He floods them with double peace, while the wicked are filled with trouble, saying, **“I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near,’ says the Lord, ‘and I will heal him,’ but the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose water cast up mire and dirt. ‘There is no peace,’ says the Lord, ‘for the wicked.’”** (Is. 57: 19-21)

He invites those far off (the unbelievers) and those who are near (the fallen believers), to come to Him with repentance, to grant them double peace. And as **St. Augustine** says, [God has

¹ *Lowliness of Mind.*

² *On Ps. 77.*

³ *In 1 Cor. Hom 23.*

⁴ *Letters to the Fallen Theodore. 1:6.*

promised real comfort in the words of Isaiah: ***“Peace, peace to those far and near, I will heal them, and restore comfort to them”*** (Is. 57: 17). Without this comfort, people would find themselves amid earthly joy, which is corruption more than comfort¹.] And also: [What the wicked calls joy, is not at all joy².]

¹ Ep. 130:3.

² On Ps. 97.

CHAPTER 58

THE REJECTED FASTING

Having spoken of adultery, connected with forsaking God and worshipping idols, as obstacles on the way of enjoying God's salvation and dwelling in the house of the Lord, the prophet moves to the formality of worship as another obstacle, particularly as fasting and keeping the Sabbath are concerned.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. A worship of hypocrisy | 1-2. |
| 2. The rejected fast | 3-5. |
| 3. The accepted fast | 6-7. |
| 4. Fruits of the right worship | 8-12. |
| 5. Keeping the Sabbath | 13-14. |

1. A WORSHIP OF HYPOCRISY

If following idolatry brought the spirit of corruption and rebellion to the life of people; "*under every spreading tree and in every ravine, on mountains and lofty hills,*" committing adultery and offering their children as human sacrifices; Yet, what is far more serious, is that they mingled that great evil with the worship of the living God, in order to comfort their own conscious. This is the most dangerous enemy that faces the religious and offends people in the knowledge of God - hypocrisy, covering up evil and corruption, through formalities of worship, without genuine repentance. Now, God instructs the prophet to: "***Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet. Tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins***" (Is. 58: 1)

That is to expose their wounds, so that their conscious would not find peace through worship full of hypocrisy; in the way a physician exposes wounds or hidden ailments in order to heal them.

In the New Testament, the Lord Christ sent us His Holy Spirit to "*convict the world of sin*" (John 16: 8); namely to reveal to the soul in its depths its hidden wounds, and to persuade it to repent, instead of covering up wounds, that would corrupt the whole body.

Exposing sins does not imply that God rejects or forsakes His people; but, on the contrary, it is a sign of His love for them; That is why He tells him: "*Tell My people... and to the house of Jacob*" (Is. 58: 1), without holding back.

When He spoke of idols worship, of adultery, or sacrificing their children, God did not instruct His prophet to "*raise his voice like a trumpet,*" as these are obvious sins. But, speaking of hypocrisy, He demands that; as this is a concealed sin that infiltrates the souls of worshippers,

and difficult to discover. That is why when rebuking adulterous and tax-collectors the Lord used to address them individually, without hurting their feelings; yet, with hypocrite leaderships, His words were firm and open.

People covered up by following outer appearances, as:

- a. Public and continuous praying: **“Yet, they seek Me daily.” (Is. 58: 2).**
- b. Boasting spiritual intellectual gnosis: **“They delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness.” (Is. 58: 2)** They are keen on reading the Holy Scripture, and attending meetings, as a matter of habit; or in the way Herod was happy to listen to John the Baptist.
- c. Showing zeal to practice justice and piety (Is. 58: 2).
- d. **“They take delight in approaching God” (Is. 58: 2);** namely pretending to be close to God, worshipping Him and keeping His commandments.

2. REJECTED FAST

“Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen’? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?” (Is. 58: 3)

To that He answered:

a. **“In fact, on the day of your fast you find pleasure; and exploit all your laborers.” (Is. 58: 3)** As the Pharisee thought that God finds pleasure in his fasting twice a week (Luke 18: 12), so these people, likewise fast, yet, they do whatever they like, and not what God likes; which is proved by the fact that, contrary to the Law, they did not give their laborers time to rest or to share their fast and worship, but forced them for the sake of their greed and love of getting richer.

God does not wish us to fast just for food, without fasting for greed and love of the world, demonstrated in our relationship with others. In other words, we should control our souls together with our bellies.

By **“pleasure”** he probably means, not only concerning material gain, but also fulfilling bodily lusts in place of chasteness.

b. **“Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high.” (Is. 58: 4)**

Instead of condemning and rebuking oneself on the day he fasts, he enters into a debate with others and condemn them; that is why God will not acknowledge his fast, and his voice will not be heard on high. That was what happened when Ahab, king of Israel and his wife Isabel intended to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite; as Jezebel while planning for his murder, she sent a letter to the elders and nobles to proclaim a fast (1 Kings 21: 12).

While fasting man strikes his fellow with the fist of wickedness, in place of presenting

works of love. That is why **Bishop Yousab El-Abah** says, [Do not fast on bread and salt, while eating people's flesh through judgment and condemnation. Do not claim to be practicing a (clean) fast, when you are actually defiled by all sins.]

c. *“Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?” (Is. 58: 5)* It is well for man to bind his fast with humility, yet if he stops at the outer appearance, it will lose its essence. It is fitting for him to humble himself repenting his sins, and feeling his weaknesses, and not to carry the Pharisee's countenance, according to the words of the Lord: *“When you fast, do not be like hypocrites with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”* (Matthew 6: 16)

3. ACCEPTED FAST

a. Offering works of love instead of seeking self-pleasure and exploiting laborers (Is. 58: 3). Fasting is forsaking and crucifying the ego, to let Christ live in us; in order to bear the features of His love and to practice His work, as members of His body. This is fasting in its positive concept:

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen; to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh” (Is. 58: 6, 7)

How beautiful is the expression, *“Do not hide yourself from your own flesh.”* It is as though who fasts, as he crucifies himself with Christ, he comprehends that the flesh of others is his own; as he loosens the chains, it is as though he loosens his own chains; counting himself chained with those chained (Hebrew 13: 3); imprisoned with every prisoner; hungry, poor, lost, and naked with all those who are. By fasting, man loves others as himself, all being members of the same body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ He taught them to break their bread to the hungry, to take in those with no shelter, to clothe the naked, and not to hide themselves from their own flesh and blood. And now, the benefit to the giver (through his giving) is greater than that of the taker¹.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

❖ Fast is not counted as good in its own nature, but becomes 'good' and pleases God if combined with other works. Moreover, fast could be considered - through prevailing

¹ *On His Father's Silence, 20.*

circumstances - not only in vain, but also repulsive, according to the words of the Lord: *“When you fast, I shall not listen to your prayers”*¹

Abbot Theonas

- ❖ When you hear Isaiah saying, *“Break your bread for the hungry,”* do not think that fast is enough by itself. Fast controls your soul, yet it does not revive others. Your own humility benefits you if it comforts others. Do you deny yourself? Look at whom you have given what you denied yourself? How many poor got fulfilled by the food, which you denied yourself?²

St Augustine

4. FRUITS OF RIGHT WORSHIP

a. Enjoyment of divine light: *“Then your light shall break forth like the morning.”* (Is. 58: 8) By practicing fast in its positive form, man would enjoy union with the Father, through His Only-Begotten Son, by His Holy Spirit; God, the “True light,” would then shine in Him as his own light. *“Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be like the noonday.”* (Is. 58: 10)

A magnificent portrait of fast, which is combined with giving, through our union with God, the Lover of mankind! If the poor and the afflicted feel in their bitterness, as though they are in darkness, the work of love coming from the heart would be like the shining of the sun that scatters the darkness. This light does not spring from the outer appearance of giving, but through the transfiguration of the Lord of glory in the loving heart; as also said by Him: *“You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 5: 14, 16)

Fast, combined with love, springing from the heart, where the kingdom of Christ is, and demonstrated by practical behavior, will be melded with the fast of the Lord Christ, to get sanctified and accepted by the Father.

b. Enjoyment of the well being of the spirit, the soul and the body: *“Your healing shall spring forth speedily... The Lord will strengthen your bones. You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.”* (Is. 58: 8, 11) What are these strengthened bones but the well-being of the soul, that enjoys (bones) of faith, which supports the whole life of man!

It is scientifically proved that fast, combined with a period of abstention, and refraining from fat, benefits the body, as well as the soul, which submits humbly to God, who helps it to abide and grow in faith, to set, out of it, His paradise whose waters do not fail.

¹ Cassian: Conf. 21:14.

² On Ps. 43.

c. Enjoyment of God as the Leader of the soul, and the Source of its inner glory and righteousness: ***“Your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard... The Lord will guide you continually.”*** (Is. 58: 8, 11)

d. Responding to prayers: ***“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer. You shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’”*** (Is. 58: 9) As long as we, in our fast, concern ourselves, not with the outer appearance, but with opening our hearts to God, through a sanctified life, God will find pleasure in that fast, proclaimed by His response to our prayers.

❖ Do you want to raise your prayer to God? Provide it with two wings: almsgiving and fast¹.

St. Augustine

❖ God promptly responds to my prayer because I do not seek worldly happiness, goodies, health, victory over enemies, wealth, or positions².

St. Augustine

e. A condition of inner satisfaction: ***“He will satisfy your soul in draught.”*** (Is. 58: 11) On our own, we are dry and barren, but as we, in love, satisfy the hungry, God will satisfy us, despite our limitations.

f. Building others: ***“Those from among you shall build the old waste places. You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to dwell in.”*** (Is. 58: 12) When we stretch our hands in God, to do little things, like material giving or comforting the sorrowful etc. He grants us what is far greater, to help building the inner life of others, as a holy dwelling place for the Lord.

5. KEEPING THE SABBATH

After presenting a living portrait of the right fast, He revealed to us how to keep the Sabbath in its true spiritual concept, being a spiritual rest in the Lord, requesting us to:

a. ***“If you turn away your foot from... doing your pleasure on My holy day.”*** (Is. 58: 13) We should refrain from doing our pleasure on God’s holy day, to practice the sanctified life.

b. ***“And call the Sabbath a delight. The holy day of the Lord honorable.”*** (Is. 58: 13) The Sabbath is thus, not a deprivation, but inner satisfaction and joy; through which the Lord will cause us to ride, as though on the high hills of the earth, to soar in the heavenlies, and will feed us from the Manna of the eternal heritage (Is. 58: 14).

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid, 138.*

CHAPTER 59

OUR MUTINY WOULD DENY US SALVATION

In chapter 57 he spoke of adultery combined with idolatry as obstacles on the way of enjoyment of the free work of God's salvation. In chapter 58 he spoke of hypocrisy as a serious ailment that affects the religious. And now, in the present chapter, he speaks of mutiny against God as an obstacle.

1. Iniquities that hides the face of God 1-8.
2. Effect of sins 9-15.
3. Need for God, the Savior 16-21.

1. INIQUITIES THAT HIDES THE FACE OF GOD

“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” (Is. 59: 1, 2)

As far as the Lord is concerned, He is the capable, whose hand is not short that it cannot save; and He is the loving Father, whose ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear the voice of His children. Yet, it is all the fault of man, whose iniquities - his mutiny against the Lord - became a veil that separates between the two of them. They have corrupted his eyes, to behold God, and his voice to be heard by Him. God desires and capable to save, yet He does not force us to be. Our sins and transgressions stand in the way of enjoying His salvation.

❖ As long as that is the hateful cause of being separated from God, let us remove it!¹

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Every sin is serious, as it displeases God².

Abbot Theophan the Recluse

What does he mean by the sins and transgressions that separate us from God, and hide His face from us? It is the tendency of man to reject God's Law, and to depart outside His kingdom. The apostle says, *“Sin is lawlessness”* (1 John 3: 4); it is rejection of God Himself, of His kingdom, of His Law, and of His image after which we were created. That is what displeases the heart of God. In other words, our sins and transgressions, are not just certain actions, as much as they are indicates of the condition of the inner soul and where it stands as to God. Because it thinks that, being attached to Him is a sort of servitude and deprivation, it desires to rid itself of

¹ *To the Fallen Theodore, 1:8.*

² *Cf. Tomas Spidlik: The Spirituality of the Christian East, p. 187.*

Him and of His commandments, translating that in various ways. That is why the Holy Bible portrays sin sometimes as opposing God.

The work of sin - as the law of the devil's kingdom - is to snatch humanity from the kingdom of God, to deprive it of encountering the Father and to enjoy the reflection of His image, and of the fellowship with divine nature. While the work of Christ's righteousness is to draw the deceived souls to the kingdom of God, to liken the Son of God, and to share with Him His features and His glory. If sin is a condition of the soul and its situation, yet, this is demonstrated in inner actions in the heart, in thought and feelings, as well as in outer actions, in words and deeds.

St. Cyprian says, [The truth of it is presented by the prophet through divine Spirit... that although God is capable of canceling the opposing things, yet the evil worthiness of sinners stand in the way of His help. Let your sins and transgressions be counted; let the wounds of your conscious be taken into consideration, so that, each one of us, realizing that he deserves what he suffers, would stop protesting against God and against us¹.]

The prophet parades here a set of sins, previously committed by the people, and are still committed by many of them:

a. Murder and violence: ***“For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity.” (Is. 59: 3)*** If *“God is love,”* whose Law is compassion and mercy; that of the sin is hate, violence, and murder. That is why, wishing to uproot the kingdom of evil, He says, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment. And whoever says to his brother ‘Raca’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”* (Matthew 5: 21, 22)

b. Telling lies: ***“Your lips have spoken lies. Your tongue has muttered perversity.” (Is. 59: 3)*** Having rejected God, and become referred to the kingdom of the devil, they bore its features: violence, together with deceit and telling lies. The devil has been called, *“a liar and the father of it”* (John 8: 44), and a *‘deceiver.’* So, if the Lord Christ is the *“Truth,”* the devil is *“lies”* and *“deceit.”*

Lying is the law of the kingdom of the devil. So the Holy Bible warns us against it: *“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. But those who deal truthfully are His delight.”* (Proverbs 12: 22) *“No lies is of the truth”* (1 John 2: 21)

❖ Every proud and deceitful man is a liar, of whom people suffer, although they, very easily, could say the truth².

¹ *Treat. 5:11.*

² *On Ps. 140.*

St. Augustine

c. Favoritism: **“No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth.” (Is. 59: 4)** They are practicing the law of their king, namely oppression and favoritism. The fruit of their offending deeds is the destruction of others with no benefit to themselves. In this, they liken a woman who is conceived, not by a human fetus, which give her joy when delivered, but after too long suffering pregnancy and labor, she brings forth iniquity, that destroys her and all those who are around her. **“They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.” (Is. 59: 4)** and as the Psalmist says, **“Behold, the wicked travails with iniquity; conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood.”** (Psalm 7: 14). The second analogy is that they become like a ‘viper,’ laying viper eggs that hatch what kills and not what fulfills and supports (Is. 59: 5). The third analogy is that they are like a spider weaving a spider’s web, not to become garments, but to entrap insects (Is. 59: 5, 6).

In these three analogies there is one common factor, which is **‘deceit.’** In the first, a woman looks as though pregnant, expected to give birth to a baby, but she, instead, brings forth ‘iniquity.’ In the second, eggs, that are supposed to fulfill man, will hatch into killer vipers. In the third, man sees a beautiful delicate web that proves nothing but spider’s web that covers no nakedness, but is meant to catch flies. These are the analogies he presents for those who unfairly judge others, in the name of justice.

d. What is more serious, is that the iniquities they are committing, either mentioned here or not, are not done involuntarily or out of weakness, but they run and hasten, as though rejoicing in doing them (Is. 59: 7).

2. EFFECT OF SINS

a. Deprivation of coming close to God, **“the Truth”**: **“The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways.” (Is. 59: 8)**

Receiving sin is an acceptance of vanity and a rejection of truth; namely, an entrance into the kingdom of the devil, and deviation from that of God.

- ❖ How miserable and foolish I am! Although You are the Truth, yet, I did not seek Your counsel¹.
- ❖ When I separated myself from You, I became like nothing!²

St. Augustine

b. Getting into darkness: **“We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness.” (Is. 59: 9)**

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 169.

² الحب الإلهي، ص 171.

- ❖ How miserable I am! Darkness prevailed over me. Although You are the Light, yet I hid my face from You!¹
- ❖ You are the Light to the children of light! Your day knows no sunset! It illuminates for Your children so that they would not stumble! Those who are outside of You, walk and live in darkness. All who distance themselves from You, the true Light, will go deep into the darkness of sin; thus, will be unable to discern the traps set for them along the way².

St. Augustine

c. Loss of insight; and lack of alert spiritual leadership: *“We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes. We stumble at noonday as at twilight. We are as dead men in desolate places.” (Is. 59: 10)* The Lord Christ, the Sun of righteousness has shined, and we became as though in noonday. Yet, because of loss of insight, some of us stumbled as though in darkness. He hid His Deity. In the mist of the body, and in the lack of faith the deniers fell like dead.

d. Crying out with no avail; the grown-ups pray loudly, growling like bears, and the young moan sadly like doves, but salvation is far from both (Is. 50: 11); for no other reason but their persistent and growing mutiny, that turned into a company to man, knowingly committed (Is. 59: 12).

In other words, they keep on praying, yet in vain; as their prayers spring out of hearts that are not true in yearning to God, in trusting in His work in their life, and in their spiritual behavior. God, in His love, yearns to respond to men prayers, even before being expressed by his tongue, yet man, through his evil and lack of faith, denies himself the enjoyment of this divine gift.

- ❖ He is positively sure that his prayers are not going to be responded to! Who is this miserable man? Who prays and does not believe that God will listen to his prayers?

St. John Cassian

e. Righteousness standing afar off God, through holding fast to lying, and failing of the spirit of truth (Is. 59: 14, 15).

3. NEED FOR GOD THE SAVIOR

God was greatly displeased by that. Yet the Creator of man, who loves and cares for him, does not stand as a spectator. *“The Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor. Therefore His*

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص 167.

² الحب الإلهي، ص 71.

own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.” (Is. 59: 15, 16)

- ❖ Because of that separation, the Intercessor was sent to uproot the sin out of the world, through which we were separated from Him as enemies, to get reconciled with Him, and to turn from enemies into children¹.

St. Augustine

As there could not be an intercessor, capable of reconciling us with God, the Lord Himself, descended, and as expressed by **St. Gregory the Theologian**: [You haven't entrusted an angel, an archangel, nor a prophet to save us; but You Yourself, got incarnated, and likened us in every thing, except in sin².] What did that atoning Intercessor do to us?

a. He preceded us as the Leader of the battle, and as a Representative of mankind, granting us victory by His authority and righteousness. ***“He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head. He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay.” (Is. 59: 17, 18)*** In place of the sin to which we were bound and got destroyed, He put on His divine righteousness as a breastplate for us; and in place of the perdition that came upon us, He put on His head a helmet of salvation; and in place of the weakness and collapse in which we fell, He put on the garment of vengeance against the devil and his angels, to repay them for their evil, and to deprive them of their authority over nations in the east and west. The Savior is glorified in peoples and nations, granting them victory, even over an enemy who comes like a sweeping flood; yet the Spirit of the Lord will stop him (Is. 59: 19).

b. He established His Church, the new Zion, as a center of repentance (Is. 59: 20). He set it as a hospital for the sick, and not as a tribunal for judgment and condemnation, saying, ***“The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,’ says the Lord.” (Is. 59: 20)***

- ❖ Compassion to the weak and the sinners is the sole virtue that seeks the growth of the Church, the price that the Lord desires for His blood. Compassion is following the example of that of heaven toward mankind, aiming to salvation of all³.

I wish we do not mock any one for his sin, but be sad; as it is written: ***“Do not rejoice over me, my enemy. When I fall I will rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me”*** (Micah 7: 8) He did not say that haphazardly, as he who rejoices over the fallen, would be rejoicing in the victory of the devil. Thus, we should be sad when we hear of someone who

¹ *Against 2 Letters of the Pelagians, 4.8.*

² *The Coptic Liturgy of St. Gregory the Theologian.*

³ *On Repentance, 1.*

perished, for whom the Lord Christ died¹.

St. Cyprian the Martyr

c. Setting a new covenant with humanity (Is. 59: 21), together with confirmation of the realization of divine promises.

¹ *Ibid 2.*

4
THE NEW CITY OF THE LORD
ISAIAH 60-66

CHAPTER 60

THE CITY OF LIGHT

Having dealt with the obstacles that come in the way of man's enjoyment of salvation (Is. 57-59), he presents to us, at the end of his book, a joyful and magnificent portrait of establishing the new city of the Lord (Is. 60-66).

In this chapter he introduces a magnificent portrait of the Church of the New Testament, as being the enlightening Zion, the Lord's city and the icon of heaven.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. A city of light | 1-2. |
| 2. A center of attraction to the nations | 3-9. |
| 3. A glorified city | 10-22. |

1. A CITY OF LIGHT

The Lord has already confirmed that He is taking over upon Himself the salvation and redemption of Zion, establishing His new covenant with her (Is. 59: 15-21). Now, that the Lord Christ had presented His salvation on the cross, and the Father had proclaimed His acceptance through resurrection, that was not a gift outside of the Lord Christ, as He Himself, is the Resurrection (John 11: 25), and has the authority to lay His life down and to take it again (John 10: 18). He demands from the Church of the New Testament to enjoy the life of her Redeemer, as a risen life, in which there is no place for darkness.

“Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people. But the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.” (Is. 60: 2)

When the Jews returned from captivity, they counted themselves as though having risen from death. They enjoyed the light of life and freedom after seventy years of humiliation as if living in the darkness of the grave. On the other hand, the Church of the New Testament has enjoyed what is far greater, that is, her union with the true Light, as an eternal Groom, who makes of her a bride that bears His light, splendor, and glory. And as the Lord Himself says, *“I am the Light of the world”* (John 8: 12), He likewise called His disciples *“the light of the world”* (Matthew 5: 14), as they carry Him in them.

What is the source of the Church's enlightenment?

It's the resurrection of the Lord, which presented us with the new life, undefeatable by death, unaffected by darkness, and indestructible by the grave. That is why the apostle says, *“Awake, you who sleep. Arise from the dead. And Christ will give you life.”* (Ephesians 5: 14)

As Baptism is the enjoyment of the resurrection of Christ in us, it has been called, the sacrament of “Enlightenment.”

- ❖ As we get baptized, we are enlightened; and being enlightened, we get adopted; and as being adopted, we are consummated. This Sacrament is called by several names: grace, enlightenment, consummation, and cleansing. It is enlightenment; as by it we behold the holy light of salvation, namely we clearly behold God¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ Enlightenment, that is Baptism, is supporter to the weak, providing light and upheaval from darkness. Enlightenment is a ship sailing towards God, with Christ, the basis of religion, and consummation of intellect! Enlightenment is the key to the Kingdom and restoration of life!²

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

- ❖ Baptism is the daughter of the day as it opened its gates, the night, into which the whole creation had entered, flew away³.

Mar Jacob El-Serougi

Thus, as we accept union with our crucified Lord Jesus Christ, we get buried with Him in the water of baptism and then rise bearing the new life, to live as is fitting to the children of light, and members of the holy body of Christ. After that, we should not descend again into the darkness of sin, nor give excuses of our human weakness, as in us we bear the light of the Lord, and on us His glory shines. We should not be anymore an earth of darkness, but a heaven that embraces the glory and splendor of God.

That is the feature of the Church having a new life in Christ, in which He dwells, and over which His divine righteousness shines; of which it is said: *“Let your light so shines before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 5: 16)

- ❖ As they practice the godliness and utter them; living the godly life, defeating the hardness of heart and enjoying the peace of righteousness, they are then granted a great glory in the Church of Christ⁴.

St. Augustine

The Lord Christ came to the world to acquire humanity as His bride, in whom He pours His glory and splendor, and He grants her His Holy Spirit to adorn and beautify, to prepare her for the heavenly wedding and to tell her: *“Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear. Forget your own people also, and your father’s house. So the King will greatly desire your beauty. Because He is your Lord, worship Him... The royal daughter is all glorious within.”*

¹ Kay’s Writings of Clement of Alexandria, p. 437.

² للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981م، ص 83.

³ ميمر عن المعمودية المقدسة.

⁴ City of God, 5:14.

(Psalm 45: 10 - 13)

2. A CENTER OF ATTRACTION TO NATIONS

The glory of God within the soul is attractive since it attracts the souls to its spiritual kingdom. As the Church of the New Testament becomes a city of light, it attracts the nations; and as said by the Lord: *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp-stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 5: 14 - 16) This is a realization of what came in the book of Isaiah: *“The Gentiles shall come to your light; the kings to the brightness of your rising.”* (Is. 60: 3)

The Church becomes like her Groom, the pillar of the true light, who leads nations along the way of the Lord, and sets in them spiritual kings, with inner authority. The Church looks all around her to behold the amazing work of God, attracting, from all nations, sons and daughters for her; to become honored household of God, born on the hands (Is. 60: 14).

The power of Christ, risen from the dead, in His Church, is demonstrated in transforming energies (wealth of the nations) to His Kingdom’s account; as is being said to His bride, *“Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy. Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you. The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.”* (Is. 60: 5)

What is the abundance of the sea or the wealth of the Gentiles that are sanctified to the account of the Church of Christ?

a. The abundance of the sea (Is. 60: 5), namely the fish and pearls. The Fathers of the Church called the Lord Christ “the Fish” (*Ichthus*); and the believers are the multitude of fish that live with Christ and in Him (Ezekiel 9). **Tertullian** says, [Like our big Fish Jesus Christ, we the small fish are born in the water, and will never be safe unless we stay always in water¹.]

b. Camels from Median and Sheba will carry gold and incense, not for trading, but to be offered as a gift to Zion. The Wisemen offered gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Lord Christ, as a sign that He is a King (the gold), a God (the incense) and a sufferer (the myrrh). In the same way the members of His body become kings, who offer incense to their Savior.

c. Offering acceptable sacrifices for the ministry and adornments for the house of the Lord (Is. 60: 7, 8). These sacrifices are our life, bodies, and all our energies, binding with the unique Sacrifice, to turn into burnt offerings of love offered through the cross. The apostle says, *“I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”* (Romans 12: 1) Our sacrifices to the

¹ للمؤلف: الكنيسة بيت الله، 1979م، ص 311-314.

Lord, according to **St. Jerome**¹, are our “souls.”

d. The best we can offer to Zion is probably our ability to fly as a cloud, carried by the Spirit of the Lord to heaven, to live with our Christ in His glories, as though in our own home. **“Who are these who fly like a cloud, and like doves to their roosts?” (Is. 60: 8)**

In the last day, the Lord will come on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 24: 30); borne by His saints, the luminous light clouds (Is. 19: 1). Likening us to the clouds implies that we become a throne bearing our Christ, while likening us to doves implies that we become spiritual because the Holy Spirit, during the baptism of Christ, appeared as a dove. In other words, binding with the Church of the Lord will turn us into a throne for the Lord, bearing the fruits of His Holy Spirit.

In the Septuagint version it came as: *“Who are these who fly like a cloud, and like doves to their roosts?”* **St. Gregory of Nyssa**² believes that this prophetic phrase proclaims from afar the future Church coming with its numerous children, full of beauty.

St. Gregory of Nyssa³ compares between the true children of the Church, who are light as the Spirit, flying as doves and clouds, and the wicked ones, who, because of the weight of sin, sink as though in deep waters. [One walks lightly enough to float while the other one sinks in deep waters. The virtue is light, so it floats, and all who walk in its way fly as clouds and doves with their little ones, according to Isaiah’s words. On the other hand, sin is heavy, and according to another prophet, as though sitting on a lead disc (Zechariah 5: 7).]

e. Silver and gold (Is. 60: 9): Silver refers to the word of God (Psalm 12: 6), and gold refers to the pure heavenly life. As though the wealth of the future Church coming from the Gentiles, lies in her commitment to the word of God, and her enjoyment of heavenly thought.

3. A GLORIFIED CITY

a. **“The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls and their kings will serve you.” (Is. 60: 10)** Referring here to Cyrus the foreigner, who ordered the return of the captives, and gave Nehemiah every facility to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

God in His love uses all foreign energies to build His kingdom, presenting all the goodness for the sake of His Church. This is truly the glory of the Church, sanctifying every work!

b. The beauty of the Church lies in that its gates are open continually, day and night (Is. 60:11). It never turns a sinner back, or hurt his feelings. It carries a wide heart, full of love

¹ On Ps. Hom 23.

² On the Baptism of Christ.

³ On Virginity 18.

towards all, as does her Groom.

It is like the ark of Noah, with wide doors, receiving Noah and his family, together with beasts and birds, etc. Whoever inside, was saved, and every one refused to enter perished, ***“For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined.”*** (Is. 60: 12) As St. Cyprian says, [There is no salvation out of the Church.]

c. ***“And the glory of Lebanon shall come to you. The Cypress, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary, and I will make the place of My feet glorious.”*** (Is. 60: 13) Lebanon was well known for its excellent trees; hence the use of its wood in adorning the temple of the Lord. This is a magnificent portrait of transforming the idle or misused energies to the account of the temple of the Lord.

d. Enjoyment of spiritual authority, when the powers of darkness submit underneath the soles of believers’ feet. ***“Also the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you the city of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”*** (Is. 60: 14) Even the devil with all his energies will witness to believers that they are the holy city of the Lord. The wicked will not have except to witness to the children of God, to the holiness of their lives, even at the moments that they afflicted them.

e. Enjoyment of continuous everlasting joy: ***“Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no one went through you, I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations.”*** (Is. 60: 15) This is its everlasting pride, that it is not any more forsaken, nor suffering from a condition of void, isolation or hate, but will be filled with joy, to become eternally glorified.

f. God will grant it much more than it asks for. ***“Instead of bronze I will bring gold. Instead of iron I will bring silver. Instead of wood, bronze; and instead of stones, iron.”*** (Is. 60: 17) Thus it will find in God its inner satisfaction, the source of its spiritual wealth, and the satisfaction of all its needs.

g. Justice will dwell in it: ***“Violence shall no longer be heard in your land; neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates praise.”***(Is. 60: 18) Everyone will find in it his salvation, and the source of his joy and praise. In it, God, the Just, grants justice and righteousness, and will not allow affliction, wasting, or destruction within its borders.

h. Being the icon of heaven, it does not need the sun or moon to give it light. ***“But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory”*** (Is. 60: 19)

i. Enjoyment of righteous life (Is. 60: 21)

j. Enjoyment of the exalted power of God: “***A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.***” (Is. 60: 22) Man, on his own is counted small but as a member of the body of Christ, he is to be counted as a thousand, that is to say heavenly, since the figure 1000 refers to heaven. Out of Christ, he is belittled, is for the devil to play with, and for sin to destroy him. But in Jesus Christ, he will be a strong (nation), as he is carrying holy energies of the spirit and body, working together in harmony and unity, bearing in it the strength of Spirit of the Lord.

Thus, this chapter presents us with a living portrait of the Church of the Lord Christ, being the city of light, that bears in it the shining of the Lord Christ; attracts nations and peoples by its inner glory, sanctifies all their energies and possibilities that they previously abused; opens up its gates before all in love. The Lord opens His gates before His Church, to grant her far more than she asks for, to grant her His righteousness, justice, strength, beauty, and light, to let it be in need of nothing.

CHAPTER 61

THE NEW LIFE

The Lord Christ presents us a living program for his work of salvation. He has come for the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, and for all the mourners, to give comfort and glory through the renovation that He grants to those who believe in Him, to set them priests and kings for Him, and elect them a spiritual bride sanctified for Him.

- 1. Christ's program of salvation** 1-3.
- 2. New ecclesiastical life** 4-6.
- 3. Glorified ecclesiastical life** 7-9.
- 4. A joyful marital life** 10-11.

1. CHRIST'S PROGRAM OF SALVATION

The Lord Christ presents to us, on the tongue of Isaiah, a living program for His work of salvation, expressed concisely but deeply in the following:

1. Humanity enjoys the Holy Spirit, who renews and enriches the human nature, purifies it of its corruption, and grants it the new life, which is in Christ Jesus, hence enjoys the participation in divine life. This gift has been presented to us in the person of the Lord Christ, who says, "*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me.*" (Is. 61: 1). As we said in the commentary on chapter 11, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son; not a stranger to Christ, but through incarnation, He received Him in the name of the Church, and on account of those who believe in Him.

- ❖ The Holy Spirit deserted man, as it could not dwell in corruption, but now, a new Man appeared among humans, Who alone makes the return of the Spirit possible, since this Man is without sin.
- ❖ God promised to give the grace of the Spirit back to humanity and there was no other way to do that, but through Jesus Christ. It is an everlasting return, caused by a condition of stability and steadiness.
- ❖ Christ granted the Holy Spirit to His Manhood; and by that He once more harmonized the Spirit with our nature.
- ❖ The return of the Holy Spirit to man in Christ, the incarnate God, the second Adam, is an everlasting return. The Holy Spirit descended on the second Adam for His righteousness; and righteousness in Christ is steadfast one, because the union of divinity with manhood in the

Person of Christ is steadfast... And this is a steadfast guarantee for humanity and its stability in the new life.

St. Cyril the Great¹

- ❖ The name “Christ” implies the Anointer, the Anointed, and the Anointment itself. The Father is the One who anoints, the Son is One anointed, and the Spirit is the Anointment².

St. Irenaeus

- ❖ The Holy Spirit shined in its fullness on Him since those who are similar dwell in one another. But as far as you are concerned, after you came up out of the baptismal font, you were granted the anointment, symbolizing Christ was anointed with, that is the Holy Spirit³.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

As Lord Christ was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah, He read this chapter. *“He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down... And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”* (Luke 4: 17- 21)

2. The Lord Christ came to preach good tidings to the poor, heal the broken hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives; counting His coming as a year of Jubilee, acceptable to the Lord... to comfort those who mourn in Zion (Is. 61: 2; Leviticus 25: 9, 40).

3. His coming is *“the day of vengeance of our Lord”* (Is. 61: 2), in which He destroyed the authority of the forces of darkness: the devil, his fallen angels, and his evil works.

4. The Lord sets the believers as *“trees of righteousness; the plantings of the Lord” in the divine paradise, “to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of despair”* (Is. 61: 3); that is to say, to pour on them His beauty, joy, and praise, in place of humiliation, mourning, and despair!

2. THE NEW ECCLESIASTICAL LIFE

The mission of the Lord Christ, whom the Father had anointed to preach good news to the poor, is *“to rebuild the old ruins”* (Is. 61: 4), which became desolate along the ages. The human nature, along all ages, became like ruined cities, which need to be demolished and rebuilt. This is the work of God the Creator, who sets His kingdom in us, turning us, by His Holy Spirit, from being a dwelling place for sin and evil, into a sanctuary for the Lord. As to the foreigners who tend to our sheep, guard our land, and work as vinedressers in our vineyards, they are the inner energies and motives of our souls, that became as though foreign or a stranger to the Lord and

¹ القمص متىاس فريد: التجسد والروح القدس، 1981، ص 10.

² *Adv. Haer 3:18:3.*

³ *On Myst. 3:1.*

His kingdom. They submit anew, so as not to be obstacles on the way of our salvation, but, on the contrary, as supporter that helps the soul in its holy battle. This is similar to what the Hebrew people did in older days; when they carried with them the gold, silver, and precious clothing of the Egyptians, to use them to build the tabernacle, instead of using them in idol worship in Egypt¹.

He says, *“You shall be named the Priests of the Lord”* (Is. 61: 6). As carrying the new nature through baptism, we become spiritually priests, raising our hands in prayers, and presenting our bodies as sacrifices of love accepted by the Father. **St. Jerome**, calls that priesthood ‘Laic Priesthood².’

3. THE GLORIFIED ECCLESIASTICAL LIFE

God grants His Church a flood of inner glory, heavenly comforts, and everlasting joy.

a. Double reward instead of the old troubles: *“Instead of your shame, you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double.”* (Is. 61: 7)

What is this double reward that we shall enjoy instead of our shame? It is the enjoyment of the forgiveness of our sins, and gaining the righteousness of Christ. In other words, uprooting the shame of sin to enjoy the glory of Christ in us, forgiving us as rebellious slaves to accept us as children of God in Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son.

The redeeming work of Christ did not stop at paying back the debt that burdened our souls, but He presented us with righteousness to partake His glory. The apostle says, *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”* (Colossians 3: 3, 4)

He probably also means by the double inheritance, the two resurrections: the first which we get, here in our contemporary life, enjoying the resurrected life; and the second, when the Lord of glory comes on the clouds, to be resurrected with Him and be with Him in His glory. **St. Augustine** says, [We, who died a double death (of the soul and of the body), will enjoy a double resurrection. So far, we have had one resurrection, which is that from sin, since in baptism, we have been buried with Him, and raised with Him by His resurrection. This resurrection is the salvation from our sins, while the other one is the resurrection of the body. He has given us the greater resurrection, and here we are, waiting for the lesser one! The first resurrection is greater than the second, as salvation from our sins is far greater than resurrection of our body³.]

If the kingdom of the devil is marked by selfishness that brings about hate, the shame into

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981م، ص 14.

² *Dialogue against Luciferians.*

³ الحب الإلهي، ص 683.

which we have fallen, is getting marked by that killing feature. In place of that shame, we gained the double inheritances that are, love in its two consummated aspects: love of God and love of the neighbor. It is as though the work of Christ in us is to destroy our 'ego,' in order to grant us an exalted love for God and His creation.

b. ***“Everlasting joy shall be theirs.” (Is. 61: 7)*** As long as the ecclesiastical life here is a pledge of the heavenly life, featured by double glory instead of shame, with love instead of selfishness, it bears by this the nature of joy and happiness! The cause of our joy is that we carry our Christ in us, to set His heavenly joyful kingdom in our depths.

c. ***“I will make with them an everlasting covenant.” (Is. 61: 8)*** The book of Isaiah often talked of that everlasting covenant between God and His Church, proclaimed in the body of the crucified Christ, as a mystery of an everlasting reconciliation.

d. Blessings in their spiritual fruits as well as their descendants: ***“Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom the Lord has blessed.” (Is. 61: 9)***

Who are these blessed descendants acknowledged by the Gentiles? He does not mean our children according to the flesh, but those who have become disciples to the Lord through us; those who would get to know salvation and gain the new birth through our living testimony to the gospel of our salvation.

He probably also means by descendants and posterity, the holy works, that are the fruits of the Holy Spirit of God in us, and the free gift of His grace in our life.

4. A JOYFUL MARITAL LIFE

The true ecclesiastical life is an everlasting wedding filled with joy and endless rejoice, through which we are clothed with the garments of salvation as an everlasting wedding garment, or a general priestly garment...

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall be joyful in my God. For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” (Is. 61: 10)

In some of the traditional Churches, the priest repeats this phrase, as he puts on his priestly garments to partake of the sacrament of the Eucharist, counting that he is approaching a joyful wedding, that necessitates getting clothed with the hidden garments of salvation, righteousness, and the adornment of the Spirit. What is this garment but the Lord Christ Himself? By whom the believers are clothed with as they enjoy the water of baptism. (Galatians 3: 27)

❖ Truly, Christ is the adornment of the bride. He who is, was, and will be the blessed now, and

forever, Amen¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ Now, (after baptism), having taken off the old garments, and put on the white ones spiritually, it is fitting to keep on wearing what is white. Of course we do not mean by that to wear only white attire, but to clothe ourselves with garments, that are white with truth, spiritually shining, thus saying with Isaiah: “ *My soul rejoices in my God, who clothed me with the garment of salvation*”².”

❖ Keep the holy day, clothed with the garment of salvation, Jesus Christ³.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

The prophet clarified what he means by the garment of salvation, saying, “*For as the earth brings forth its bud; as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.*” (Is. 61: 11) It is as though the garment of salvation is the righteousness of Christ and His praise that He grants us is a free gift from Him.

¹ *On the Baptism of Christ.*

² *On the Myst. 4:8.*

³ *Ibid 5:10.*

CHAPTER 62

THE CHURCH, THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

God proclaims His zeal for the new Zion, the Church of the New Testament, by accepting her as a holy bride that bears a new name and enjoys the glory of her heavenly Groom. He guards her by His heavenly hosts and makes her life a mystery of joy and praise for humanity.

1. A new name and a glorified life 1-3.
2. A heavenly bride 4-5.
3. Watching with praise 6-9.
4. Preparing the way for her 10-12.

1. A NEW NAME AND A GLORIFIED LIFE

“For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace. And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name.” (Is. 62: 1, 2)

The speaker here is the Word of God, in whom the Church occupies the center of His heart. He came to the world to betroth her as an eternal bride. If Boaz did not hold his peace until he got married to Ruth, the Gentile (Ruth 3: 18), the Lord Christ not stop His continuous work until He embraces to His bosom, the Church He purchased with his precious blood, as His bride. He is the Sun of righteousness that shines on her, so that she bears His righteousness as her own, enjoys splendor and becomes a spiritual lamp that all the winds of the world will not be capable of quenching it. He says to her, *“you were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord.*” (Ezekiel 16: 13, 14)

The Lord Christ grants in her His splendor and His glory as hers, to enjoy complete renovation, that covers even her name as a sign of perfect renovation: *“You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name.”* When the Lord Christ came and granted us renovation by His Holy Spirit, we carried His name as a new name, thus we became Christians. That is why the early Church apologist, the Philosopher Athenagorus, says that the main accusation against the early Christians was their name “Christians.”. The persecution against them was intense, not because of any offense they have committed, but because of the name they carried.

The Church of the New Testament enjoyed her attribution to the name of the Savior, as a living source of His exalted righteousness as a mystery of her beauty. *“You shall also be a crown*

of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.” (Is. 62: 3)

The Lord calls her “*a crown of glory*” and “*a royal diadem,*” not to be placed over the Lord’s head, because He is in no need of additional dignity, but in His hand, since she and her glory are His hand’s work. He will remain the head, and she His glorified body.

2. A HEAVENLY BRIDE

One of the new names enjoyed by the Church is, “the bride of Christ.” “*You shall no longer be termed ‘forsaken,’ nor shall your land any more be termed ‘desolate,’ but you shall be called ‘Hephzibah,’ and your land ‘Beulah.’ For the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you. And the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*” (Is. 62: 4, 5)

Outside Christ the Savior, she used to be called ‘*forsaken*’ and ‘*desolate.*’ She was like a dry land with no life or fruit; and as a girl deserted by all becoming a desolate soul, crushed under a feeling of isolation and desertion. Now, through Christ, she became an everlasting heavenly bride, who carries two dignified terms, instead of the two old ones: ‘*Hephzibah,*’ meaning ‘My pleasure is in her’ and ‘*Beulah,*’ meaning ‘with a husband’ or ‘married.’ She became the subject of God’s pleasure, living in the bosom of her heavenly Groom.

Her sons love her land, where they work joyfully and happily, as though they are married to the Church, working for her, not as slaves, nor hired hands who expect their wages, but as a husband who rejoices over his bride, and seeks her comfort and well being. This is the feature of God’s children, who joyfully dedicate their hearts, thoughts, and energies to work in the Church of Christ.

It is to be noticed how this bride is unique, regarding the following:

a. She is a virgin, yet, at the same time, a mother with children, something not to be realized to any girl, except to St. Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. She gave birth to Jesus, the Lord of glory, but continuously kept her virginity, since her Son is the Grantor of virginity she became the ideal member in the Church. Our Church is “*a chaste virgin to Christ*” (2 Corinthians 11: 2), yet she is the mother of believers at the same time.

Also, as we receive membership in the Church, our inner souls become chaste virgins, yet with love, carrying a sort of motherhood towards humanity.

❖ Your virginity should be spiritual... It is truly difficult for many people to be virgins according to the flesh, yet every believer should be a virgin according to the spirit.

Therefore, be alert, O my soul, and guard your virginity.

❖ The mother of the Lord Christ is a virgin; and His bride (the Church) is also a virgin.

❖ Grace made of the virgin a mother, yet kept her virginity².

Fr. Theodosius of Ancra

b. By saying “*For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you*” (Is. 62: 5) He reveals the unity of the Church. He counts all her sons as one young man, since all of them live with one goal and one aim, which is “union with the Father in His Son Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.” From another aspect, it is not meant as marriage in its carnal concept, since it is not fitting for sons to marry their own mother, but it implies the attachment of the children of God to His bride, the Church, and their union with her. Finally, likening the sons of the Church to a young man implies their continuous youth, as they will never get old or weak.

c. By saying “*And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you*” (Is. 62: 5) He reveals that the Church is characterized by a persistent joy and shall stay in a condition of continuous wedding, in which each party yearns to the other. In other words the wedding will never grow old and will never submit to time, but will stay forever young.

It is admirable that, in the liturgy of matrimony of the Coptic Church, the Church is referred to as the bride of Christ, and St. Mary as a living example of enjoyment of inner wedding with the Lord Christ. At the end of that liturgy deacons sing the following words: “Peace be with the shining bride, mother of Him who shines. Peace is with her, who received the Word in her womb. Peace is with her, who is more dignified than the Cherubim. Peace is with her, who gave birth to the Savior of our souls.”

3. WATCHING WITH PRAISE

The Jews having suffered captivity counted themselves as one wife deserted by her husband, or a land that turned wild; but now the Lord takes them back to work their own land. But as some of them harbored fear of being captivated again, the Lord confirms His watch for His people returning to Him.

If the devil has captivated us in his land, deprived us of the promised land, and of enjoying the heavenly sanctuaries, now through the cross, we became a bride to the Lord, and returned as though to paradise, as a home of our own, or a holy city where we dwell with our God, who “*sets watchmen on its walls, who shall never hold their peace day or night.*” (Is. 62: 6).

Who are those watchmen set by the Lord over His Church, but His honest ministers, alert with the spirit of persistent prayers, beside their loving shepherding work? That is what we feel

¹ *De Virginibus* 1:5:22. PL. 19:195.

² *On the Nativity of our Savior* 2.

about the ministry of the apostle Paul, who says, *“Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”* (Acts 20: 31) Likewise the ministry of the prophet Samuel who says, *“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.”* (1 Samuel 12: 23) Thus, persistent prayers meld with love and continuous teaching all being works of watching for the city of the Lord.

In the life of a true Christian, who has got a practical spiritual knowledge, the Gnostic, a continuous inner watch should be set. **St. Clement of Alexandria**, expressed this by saying, [It is appropriate for the Gnostic to contemplate as much as possible in God¹.]

How beautiful is the phrase: *“You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent; and give Him no rest till He establishes...”* (Is. 62: 6, 7) So the Lord persuades us to remember Him all the time and not to keep silent, so that He also will not keep silent. If we remember Him, He will also remember us. He yearns to enter with us into a strong and continuous relationship, seeking to establish us as His new glorified Jerusalem and to make of us *“a praise in the earth”* (Is. 62: 7). Everyone who looks at us or have contact with us will enjoy the icon of heaven and the true inner joy.

God grants us to enjoy the fruit of His Holy Spirit made of grain and wine that the enemy will not take it away from us. What is grain but the enjoyment of fellowship with Christ ‘the unique grain’? And what is the wine but the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of joy? It is as though our watching in the Lord keeps our fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, our heavenly Grain, through His Holy Spirit, the unique Wine.

4. PREPARING THE WAY FOR HER

Preparation of God’s way in our life is a preparation of our own way in His heaven. He crosses over to the gates of our hearts, to carry us to His eternal gates. He sets His cross as a banner of love for us, to pass with it through the spiritual battle, and gain the heavenly reward. That is why it is said: *“Go through, Go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, Build up the highway! Take out the stones, Lift up a banner for the people! Indeed the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the world: ‘say to the daughter of Zion, Surely your salvation is coming. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.”* (Is. 62: 10, 11)

St. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the Lord (Matthew 3: 3); Yet, He who truly works and rewards, is the Savior of the Church.

¹ Strom 4:26.

CHAPTER 63

CHRIST WHO TREADS IN THE WINEPRESS

In the previous chapter the Church appeared as a bride who enjoys her attribution to God, her Savior and Groom. Now, He presents us with a portrait of the Groom who delivers his life for the sake of his bride.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1. The Crucified Christ | 1-6. |
| 2. A praise for the loving kindness of the Lord | 7-9. |
| 3. God remembers His old works with them | 10-14. |
| 4. A prayer of penitence | 15-19. |

1. THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

On the day the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem the Edomites, not only watched happily, but played a positive role against Jerusalem, by catching those who escaped to deliver them captives; beside entering with their sheep to graze in Jerusalem, etc. That is why the Psalmist cries out saying, “*Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom; the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Raze it, raze it,’ to its very foundation!*” (Psalm 137: 7) And the prophet Obadiah says, “*For your violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. In the day that you stood on the other side; in the day that strangers carried captive his forces; when foreigners entered his gates, and cast lots for Jerusalem - Even you were as one of them.*” (Obadiah 10, 11)

Edom (meaning ‘dust’ and ‘bloodthirsty’) refers to the devil; that is why the Savior appears as One coming from Edom with red apparel in majesty and greatness, treading the enemy and trampling him, as though in a winepress, to grant His people victory and salvation. “***Who is this who comes from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah? This One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength - ‘I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.’***” (Is. 63: 1)

The prophet looked at the Savior, raised on the cross, destroying the real Edom, and granting victory and splendor to His believers; so he started asking Him: Who are You? From where are you coming? How do you feel? What is your work? And what is your goal?

As to His identity He answered: “***I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.***” (Is. 63:1)

There are many, who speak in righteousness, and speak well about it, even some of the religious leaders and teachers of that time. But the Savior, Our Lord Jesus, is the only One, capable of speaking in righteousness “***mighty to save;***” namely the practical righteousness, that

grants a lavation from the enemy, and enjoyment of eternity. He, alone, is the Righteous “*Who knew no sin*” (2 Corinthians 5: 21); who bore our sins in His body to atone it by His shed blood, presenting us with His righteousness as our own. He is unique in His righteousness. On one side, He is the only One who is absolutely blameless; and, on the other side, He is capable of justifying others. He is the righteous in whom the Father is well pleased, He carries us in Him, so that we would be counted as well, as subjects of His pleasure.

The Lord Christ speaks righteousness, not just with His blessed mouth, but with all His being and life, that He delivered, by His own sacred will, through His divine love, for the sake of justifying us; to mend our corrupt nature, so that we may be partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1: 4).

He saw Him coming from ‘Edom,’ meaning ‘dust’ or ‘blood;’ as though the Lord came to where we have fallen, to ‘Edom,’ where we got back to our dust, in order to turn our dust into heaven. We were told: “*For dust you are, and to dust you shall return*” (Genesis 3: 19); But now, as our heavenly Savior descended to our earth to get us unified with Him, we hear the divine voice, saying instead: ‘For heaven you are, and to heaven you shall return.’ This is the righteousness of Christ, that lifts us, as though from trash, to set us in His heavens.

On another side, as we became ‘Edom’ (blood), fight-loving, or haters of others, our Christ came to the land of battle, to take us away from the hands of the devil, who love bloodshedding, to make our hearts wide by love, and self-giving.

As to His work, He said, “***I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me.***” (Is. 63: 3) He entered into the battle of the cross alone; and as He said to His disciples: “*You will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.*” (John 16: 32).

“***His garments like one who treads in the winepress,***” (Is. 63: 2) as they clothed Him with purple to mock Him (Mark 15: 17). It refers as well to His body being covered with blood from His multiple wounds. Such deliverance is the mystery of exalted beauty, comprehended by whoever experienced the cross as God’s power for salvation. That is why it is said, “***This One who is glorious in His apparel.***” (Is. 63: 1)

- ❖ He did a marvelous ordinance for the suffering body that was adorned with passion and glorified with Deity. There is nothing more sweet and beautiful¹.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

What He did revealed of His great love and zeal toward His bride, whom He desired to set free from the enemy - the devil, and to grant her enjoyment of the year of the permanent Jubilee or of redemption (Is. 63: 4).

¹ *Orat. On Easter, 35.*

2. A PRAISE FOR THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF THE LORD

The prophet did not find what the Church, the bride redeemed with blood, would give back, for the persistent loving-kindness of God, which has been demonstrated in its deepest form on the cross, except praising Him. God has not presented His loving-kindness for any return, but out of His mercy and compassion, considering us His people and children, sharing with us our afflictions and sufferings. What a marvelous love!

“In all their affliction He was afflicted; and the angel of His presence saved them.”
(Is. 63: 9)

3. GOD REMEMBERS HIS OLD WORKS WITH THEM

If man, in his folly, takes on an antagonistic position to his Creator and Redeemer, God in His love recalls His old works with them, how He took care of them through Moses, how He dwelt in their midst by His Holy Spirit, and how He split the sea before them, to glorify His name in them. God still desires to lead His people by Himself. Indeed He chastises them for their antagonism, yet, He anticipates their return. That is what He meant by saying, *“But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them. Then He remembered the days of old...”* (Is. 63: 10, 11)

- ❖ If we are praying and reciting psalms before Him proudly and in a critical way; if we are executing our ministry with a distracted mind, He will not only refrain from listening to us, but he will deliver us to the evil one... He will turn Himself against us, to fight us as an opponent. In other words, He will drive us out of His presence, and *“deliver us to Satan, that we may learn not to blaspheme.”* (1 Timothy 1: 20)¹

Fr. Martyrus the Syrian

4. A PRAYER OF PENITENCE

When we fall into evil, and stand in antagonism to God, God remains anticipating our return. We should not justify our transgressions, but should seek His love and zeal for us, being our Father who knows and acknowledges us more than Abraham, the father of believers, and than Israel himself (Is. 63: 16).

“Look down from heaven, and see from Your habitation, holy and glorious.” (Is. 63: 15) That is how the sinner feels as though he has defiled the earth with his sin; and as though God has departed from the earth to stay in heaven, His sanctuary and place of His glory. That is why he seeks God’s compassion, asking Him to look down from His pure heavens toward the fallen soul that is yearning to return to Him and to enjoy His presence.

That feeling, probably came as a result to the devastation that happened to the temple of

¹ Book of Perfection, 77.

the Lord. The prophet Ezekiel seeing the glory of the Lord departing from the temple and the city (Jerusalem), and even from the whole earth, he says, *“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.”* (Ezekiel 10: 18, 19)

“Where are Your zeal... and Your mercies toward me, are they restrained?” (Is. 63: 15)

Penitence is based on the discovery of God’s zeal, His deep and exalted love toward His children, and His mercies toward man whatever his weaknesses are. It is based as well on acknowledging his adoption to Him (Deuteronomy 32: 6; Is. 63: 16).

“O Lord, why have you made us stray from your ways, and hardened our heart from your fear? Return for your servants’ sake the tribes of Your inheritance.” (Is. 63: 17)

It is obvious here, that the penitent does not mean to place the blame upon God; but once discovering His Fatherhood, he started saying how he expected the support of His grace. Indeed he sinned and went far in his sin, so *“God gave (him) over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.”* (Romans 1: 28), and left him to the hardness of his heart. But now he is seeking His grace, so as not to go astray from the way of the Lord, and not to remain on his hardness of heart. This is what the Psalmist meant by saying, *“With my whole heart I have sought You. Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments.”* (Psalm 119: 10)

When one gets under chastisement, he feels so bitter, that he starts to admonish God, sometimes beseeching Him, not to forsake him in the corruptness of his mind and hardness of his heart; and sometimes entreating him to have mercy upon him for the sake of His blessed saintly servants who pray for humanity (Is. 63: 17). He finally asks Him to hasten to help him, if the duration of chastisement lasts too long. The prophet expresses this, saying, ***“Your holy people have possessed it but a little while. Our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary. We have become like those of old, over whom you never ruled, those who were never called by Your name”***(Is. 63: 18, 19).

They considered the period during which the people possessed the temple (the Lord’s Sanctuary) as ‘a little while,’ although it extended for about 400 years (from the time the temple was built to that of captivity); but, as far as the duration of captivity (70 years) is concerned, they felt that it lasted too long, because of its bitterness. They have become under captivity, like other nations as if God had never ruled over them to rescue them from this bitterness and as if they were never called by His name.

As they tasted the bitterness of captivity, they yearned to become once more ruled by God, and called by His name, to be saved by Him.

CHAPTER 64

AN ENTREATY FOR THE SAKE OF THE MESSIAH'S COMING

Certain scholars interpret what the prophet Isaiah says here - as in several other chapters - as concerning the Second Advent of the Lord Christ to reign 1000 years before the great tribulation (the millennium kingdom). But it is obvious that the prophet is talking here about the Lord's coming for salvation, that was already realized on the cross, and is still being realized practically in the heart of every believer, hungry for the Lord.

- 1. The Messiah coming down from heaven** 1-3.
- 2. The blessings of waiting for the Messiah** 4-5.
- 3. Confession of sins** 5-12.

1. THE MESSIAH COMING DOWN FROM HEAVEN

“Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence - as fire burns brushwood, as fire causes water to boil - to make Your name known to Your adversaries; that the nations may tremble at Your presence.”(Is. 64: 1, 2)

Certain interpreters believe that talk here concerns the second coming of the Lord Christ, to establish His millennium kingdom on earth, to reign and overcome His adversaries and enemies and all nations etc. This is unlike His first coming, which was concealed in the womb of the holy Virgin, when He did not cry nor raise His voice.

I do not intend here to deal with the millennium kingdom, which I have already done in the interpretation of chapter 19 of the book of Revelation. Yet what I wish to confirm is that the text of the book of Isaiah should not be understood in a literal way, as our Christ is a spiritual King, who refused to reign materially, considering His divine incarnation as though a coming down from heaven, to encounter us. Our life was as hard as mountains, He came to shake our depths, to burn the brushwood of evil in us, to let the cold water in us boil with love, and to grant us victory over the enemies of His name, not through seen wars, but through faith, working with love.

For the sake of getting rescued from captivity or afflictions, it is enough for man to ask God to *“look down from heaven, and see from His habitation, holy and glorious.” (Is. 63: 15)* Even though God is filling both heaven and earth with His Deity, yet for the sake of our salvation from sins, and of our return to the Fatherly bosom, it needs rending the heavens and coming down of the Word of God to our earth (Is. 64: 1). And as the Lord Christ said:

- ❖ *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me...that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”* (John 6: 38, 40) He came down from heaven to realize obedience, on behalf of Adam who fell into rebellion, putting forth the will of the Father, that is One with His own will: the realization of salvation and resurrection, through recognizing the Son in faith and abiding in Him.
- ❖ *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”* (John 3:13)

St. John the Baptist said of Him: *“He who comes from above is above all.”* (John 3: 31)

St. Ephram the Syrian, praises the Word of God, who has rent the heaven and came down, saying,

[Blessed is He who by His incarnation has purchased life for our human nature!

Blessed is He who sealed our soul, adorned it, and betrothed it a bride for Himself!

Blessed is He who made of our body a tent for His concealed nature!

Glory is to Him who, seeing how we likened the beasts in their violence and greed, He came down to become as One of us, in order that we become heavenly ones!¹]

The prophet David foreseeing the divine incarnation, said, *“He bowed the heavens... and came down.”* (Psalm 18: 9)

Some people believe that saying, *“Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence”* (Is, 64: 1) implies that the people, amid their affliction, felt as though God has hidden His face from them by the clouds: *“He dwells in the dark cloud”* (2 Chronicles 6: 1); *“Thick clouds cover Him, so that He cannot see.”* (Job 22: 11) As though they are crying out: “If our sins have hidden You behind the dark clouds, and denied us the understanding of the mysteries of Your intentions, there is no one but You to put things in order. We cannot ascend to You, but You can rend the veil and descend to us. It is not enough to look down on us from Your heavens, we are in need of Your dwelling in our midst.”

“The mountains might shake.” (Is. 64: 1) If the solid mountains have trembled in Sinai, as God encountered Moses (Exodus 19: 17, 18); and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, as He spoke to Elijah (1 Kings 19: 11); who could stand before Him? Only God can solve all our problems, can shake our old man and destroy the might of our evil, to establish His kingdom in us. If the devil with all his hosts and angels, with their evil works and deceits, are like mountains, the Lord would shake their kingdom by His cross. If they were like brushwood, He will burn them with fire.

We need the Lord to come down to us, as our adversaries, like mountains, who are also

¹ *On Nativity, hymn 2.*

the adversaries of His name, oppose us to take us away of His kingdom, and to uproot His name and kingdom from within us. Opposition of the devil and his hosts, however severe it is, will be like brushwood that will be burnt by God with fire, not only to scatter opposition, but also to turn it into what is good for us. He will use this fire in heating up the cold water of our hearts to boil with love and holy zeal (Is. 64: 2).

St. John Chrysostom says, [Even the devil could be for our advantage if we understand his ways, which is obvious in the episode of Job. We can also learn this from Paul, who writes concerning the adulterer: “*Deliver such one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved.*” (1 Corinthians 5: 5). You see! Even Satan could be a cause for salvation, not by his nature, but through the shrewdness of the apostle, who acted like a physician who transforms the poison of a serpent into medicine¹.]

2. THE BLESSINGS OF WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH

As the prophets lived waiting for the coming of the Messiah for salvation, we will be always waiting for Him, to reign, not on earth, but in our hearts and our inner life, to carry us to the fellowship of His glory, to behold what he has prepared for us and to get filled with joy for His righteousness working in us. The prophet says, “*For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, nor perceived by ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him. You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness.*” (Is. 64: 4, 5)

If God’s actions since the old days were so amazing, yet, no one have ever heard nor seen such things, as what God has done with humanity through His redeeming works. He came down from heaven, to encounter the sinners with joy, bringing righteousness into their lives; granting them inner glories, as a pledge of the eternal glory.

St. Hippolytus comments on this prophetically phrase, saying on the tongue of the Lord Christ: [Come into the kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of the world. Enjoy forever what is given you by My Father Who is in heaven, and by the Life-giving Holy Spirit. What mouth could express these blessings that no eye could see, or ear could hear, or man’s heart could perceive? Things that are prepared by God for those who love Him (Is. 64: 4; 1 Corinthians 2: 9) You have heard of the persistent joy! Of the unchangeable Kingdom! You have learned now about the unending banquet of blessings!²]

3. CONFESSION OF SINS

Our souls remain joyful because of the exalted redeeming works of God, waiting always for the continuous encounter with Him, to take away the shame of our sins, and to proclaim the

¹ للمؤلف: هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ ليروحنا ذهبي الفم، ص 61.

² *Anti-Niciene Frs, bol 5, p. 253.*

glory of His righteousness in us. The ways to realize that encounter are:

a. Confessing sins: *“You are indeed angry, for we have sinned.”* (Is. 64: 5) **St. Cyprian** says, [It is good to repent! If you have no place for penitence in your heart, you would lose the grace of cleansing that you have got through baptism since long time. It is far better to have a garment to mend, than not to have one to wear; but once we get one, it should be renewed¹.] **St. John Climacus** says, [Penitence renews baptism; it is undersigning a contract with God for a second life².] **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Did you sin against God? Say to Him: ‘I have sinned’; what is the big deal in that?³]

b. Realizing that our self-righteousness is incapable of saving us: *“But we are like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags. We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind, have taken us away.”* (Is. 64: 6)

Father Martyrus the Syrian, says, [*“Our vigor was turned to frailty in us”* as we saw Him (Daniel 10: 8). Because of His splendor our mouths get sealed. When we regain a little strength to talk to Him, our conscience blames us, seeing how *“we have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly”* in His presence (Psalm 106: 6). If we imagine that we are righteous, all our righteousness is like a filthy rag. To Him conquest is referred, but to us shame and disgrace (Baruch 1: 15)⁴.]

Abbot Theonas tells us how our good works could turn bad, if we lean on our self-righteousness; our righteousness is counted as a filthy rag, if compared to divine righteousness⁵.

c. Realizing the compassionate and forgiving Fatherhood of God: *“But now, O Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay, and You are our potter. And all we are the work of Your hand. Do not be furious O Lord.”*(Is. 64: 8, 9)

God presents Himself to us as a Father, a Friend, and a caring Shepherd, in order to attract every soul, through penitence, to Him. His Church carries the same features, to embrace all through love enjoying the amazing salvation of God. In a message to a fallen monk, **St. Basil, the Great** says,

[I am grieved for you. For who among the clergy would not cry, when he hears this?
Who, among the ministers of the altar, would not knock his chest?
Who, among the laity, whose conscience would not be troubled?
You have destroyed all at the same time; have let all down.

¹ *On Repentance, 2.*

² *Ladder 5; PG. 88:764B.*

³ *De Paenitentia 2:2, PG 49:285.*

⁴ *Book of perfection, 10.*

⁵ *St. Cassian: Conf. 23:4.*

Remember the good Shepherd who follows and cares for you.

Please, do not hesitate to come to me, for any worldly consideration. I stick to, and cry for my deceased, “*because of the plundering of the daughter of my people.*” (Is. 22: 4)

There you are! Everyone is ready to welcome you! Everyone shares your strife; so do not retreat...

It is time for salvation; it is time for mending!

Be of good cheer and do not despair; The Church is not a Law, to judge a sinner without mercy; but has a Law of mercy, that over-rides punishment and hopes for correction!

The doors are not yet closed. The Bridegroom is hearing...

Have compassion on yourself and on all of us in our Lord Jesus Christ¹.]

d. Remembering “*we all are His people.*” (Is. 64: 9)

e. Realizing how desolate we have been. We became like a wild desert. Fire has flared up inside us; and all our inner sanctuaries have been distorted.

¹ Ep. 44.

CHAPTER 65

THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH

God demands from us to yearn for His coming down to us and for His dwelling in us, recognizing His exalted works of salvation in our lives, together with confessing our transgressions and insufficiency of our self-righteousness. Now, He proclaims His invitation for the Gentiles without discrimination, for all to enjoy the new life in Him that which is denied to unbelievers whatever their race is.

- 1. An invitation to the Gentiles** 1.
- 2. The denial of His people** 2-7.
- 3. His care for the remnants** 8-10.
- 4. A comparison between believers and nonbelievers** 11-16.
- 5. The new heavens and the new earth** 17-25.

1. AN INVITATION TO THE GENTILES

“I was sought by those who did not ask for Me. I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Hear I am, here I am’ to a nation that was not called by My name.” (Is. 65: 1) It is obvious that the talk here concerns the acceptance of the nations that did not know God nor sought Him before, nor was called by His name; but believed in the Savior, thus enjoyed what the people of God have denied themselves by their freewill.

St. Paul, the apostle, spoke of the invitation to the gentiles and of the denial to the unbelieving Jews, in his epistle to the Romans, quoting this same prophetic phrase (Romans 10: 20, 21). While we were enemies, He reconciled us with the Father. He loved all humanity before they love Him, and elected us before we know or seek Him. He drew our hearts to Him, as He loved us even before calling us by His name.

- ❖ Did Israel hear and did not understand? If the pagan nations have heard and believed, it was far more fitting for the Jews, whom God had given since the old days all the signs that were meant to remove every obscurity from their eyes¹.
- ❖ Who are they who did not seek Him? Who are they who did not ask for Him? Definitely, they were not the Jews, but the Gentiles who did not know Him. Moses described these as, *“not a nation.”* And *“a foolish nation,”* on account of their extreme ignorance. It is a great shame that He was found by those who did not seek Him, and lost to those who looked for Him (for

¹ In Rom. Hom 18.

reason of their lack of faith)¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Who is He who has been proclaimed (and found by the Gentiles) but the Word of the Father, when He was sent by the Father, with His power to the people?!²

St. Hippolytus

2. THE DENIAL OF HIS PEOPLE

“I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts.” (Is 65: 2) On the cross, the Lord stretched out His hands with love, to embrace all and to grant them a life of victory, in the way Moses stretched his hands during the battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17), as a symbol of the work of salvation of Christ³.

- ❖ The Lord stretched His hands, expecting us to respond by seeking Him every day⁴.

St. Paphnotius

The causes of God’s rejection by His people are:

a. Their rebellion (Is. 65: 2); they walked according to their own thoughts, and not according to that of God.

b. Breaking the Law, and deviating to pagan worship (Is, 65: 3, 4).

c. Leaning upon their self-righteousness (Is. 65: 5).

St. Augustine states that denying faith in the Lord is death, as although they have seen the miracles done by the Savior with their own eyes, yet, they did not live through them, but remained in a state of death⁵.

3. HIS CARE FOR THE REMNANTS

Although the people as a whole denied Him, yet there was a holy remnant in the Lord, like the disciples, the apostles, the Marys, Zacchaeus, and Levi the tax collector etc. This small remnant will not perish but will turn into a blessing: *“As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, ‘Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it’; so will I do for My servant’s sake, that I may not destroy them all” (Is. 65: 8)* Among opponents, some elects were found for the Lord, His servants who seek Him (Is. 65: 10).

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Against the Heresy of One Noetus 12.*

³ *See Ep. of Barnabas 12; St. Justin Apol. 1:35.*

⁴ *St. Cassian Conf. 3:22.*

⁵ *On Ps. 88.*

4. A COMPARISON BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND NONBELIEVERS

a. Some of those who forsook the Lord thought that they would get away through lavishly “preparing a table... and furnishing a drink...” for pagan idols, and did not realize that they would **“bow down to the slaughter.”** (Is. 65: 11, 12)

b. Those who deny the Lord mostly think that they are leading a life of luxury without deprivation. Yet, soon it will be, that believers shall eat, while they shall go hungry; believers shall rejoice, while they shall grieve; believers shall sing for joy of heart, while they shall cry for sorrow of heart (Is. 65: 13 - 15).

c. Believers would face afflictions, yet they shall be granted the blessing of the true God, even though they are still on earth, to forget their troubles amid God’s comforts and blessings (Is. 65: 16).

5. THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH

The prophet Isaiah presents us with a magnificent portrait of the work of the Lord Christ, the Creator, to establish the Church of the New Testament. He has set a new heavens and a new earth (Is. 65: 17). He has set a true renewal of the soul (the heavens), and of the body (the earth), for both the soul and the body to become together in harmony; both submitting to His Holy Spirit. The old conflict between the desires of the soul and those of the body has come to an end. We have entered by the Holy Spirit into the life of spiritual joy and heavenly rejoicing. Our life being filled with the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, and peace (Galatians 5: 22); rejoicing like a holy bride, renewed by her Groom, who, in turn rejoices in us, saying, **“I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people.”** (Is. 65: 19) It is the joy of mutual love!

In this new life that we attain in baptism, the wolf will be lamb-like; the wolf and lamb shall feed together; the beastly and violent nature will be abolished; the lion shall feed with the cow. As to the serpents, they shall not hurt or destroy anyone who knew his adoption to God, and lived according to the possibilities of life that became his¹.

The features of this new life are:

a. We shall not remember anymore the former life or comes to our mind, as the flood of God’s blessing will absorb all our energies (Is. 65: 1).

b. A life of everlasting joy and rejoice (Is. 65: 18, 19); where **“the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard.”**

c. In it no man will suffer from weakness of infancy or old age, but all will enjoy spiritual

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981م، ص 14-15.

maturation (Is. 65: 20).

d. Filled with blessings; shall build spiritual houses and inhabit them with God; and shall plant vineyards to get fulfilled by the fruits of the Spirit (Is. 65: 21).

e. The enemy (the Devil) will not find a place among them (Is. 65: 23).

f. We will be filled with peace and not fear.

g. Before they utter their prayers, God will hear and respond: ***“Before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.” (Is. 65: 24)***

h. A change in nature through uprooting the spirit of animosity, to enjoy that of love and union, even between wolf and lamb, lion and cow, man and serpent, etc. People from various nations, some of which are savages will come, to form one congregation under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of the Lord.

CHAPTER 66

THE NEW JERUSALEM

The end of this book reveals the New Jerusalem that was established by the Lord Christ, having destroyed the killing letter bound to formalities, corruptive to our inner life and our relationship with God.

1. Corruption of formal worship 1-4.
2. Discernment between formal and serious worshippers 5-9.
3. The New Jerusalem 10-24.

1. CORRUPTION OF FORMAL WORSHIP

For a long time, the Jews leaned upon the presence of the temple in Jerusalem, as a source of security for them, whatever their relationship with God is. That is why the Lord rebukes them saying, ***“Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool; where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?”*** (Is. 66: 1)

If God, through His love, allowed man to build a house for Him, it was to proclaim His dwelling in our midst. God does not care for stones and huge buildings, but dwells: ***“On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at (His) word.”*** (Is. 66: 2) The wise king Solomon realized this fact. That is why he prayed on the day of dedication of the temple, saying, ***“Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You, how much less this temple which I have built?”*** (1 Kings 8: 27)

❖ Indeed God accepted that temple, called “The Temple of Jerusalem” as His house, not out of need for it, but in order that, when you look at it you present your souls to Him¹.

St. Justine

❖ What is that house on which David pours his soul, when he remembers it? (Psalm 42: 2) He yearns to it for love, even to death. Is it that house built of leather, linen thread, blue, purple, and scarlet yarns? David’s view was without doubt totally different!

Cast away all earthly thoughts, and walk along the way opened to you by the prophets and apostles. And above all, walk according to the word of God with all your heart and mind, to ascend to heaven and behold the splendor of the eternal dwelling, of which Moses presented only a shadow².

¹ Dial with Trypho, 32.

² In Exod. Hom 9.

- ❖ The Church of God is heaven!¹
- ❖ “*The soul of the righteous is the seat of wisdom.*” The righteous are the seats².
- ❖ You have become heaven do you fear earth? Thus, as you acquire the perfection of knowledge, and have love, you become heaven and a throne for God. The heaven that we behold by our eyes is not very precious before God. Our sanctified souls are the heaven of God. The thoughts of angels and all ministers are the heaven of God³.

St. Augustine

The Church is the cleft of the rock, into which the prophet Moses entered, in order to behold the glory of God. This rock is Christ, in whom we abide by the spirit of humility and contrition, in order to enjoy the divine dwelling; that is why it is written: “***On this one will I look: On whom who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.***” (Is. 66: 2)

- ❖ Do you like to become a place for God? Be of a poor and a contrite spirit, and tremble at God’s word⁴.
- ❖ Let our hearts tremble as God looks at us. He will then dwell in us⁵.

St Augustine

- ❖ Let us tremble at His words, and then He will always build us⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ It is fitting for us to walk along the narrow straight way, that of praise and glory, where all Christians should practice peace, humility, and tranquility of good life, according to the word of God, who does not look, except to him who is of a poor, and a contrite spirit, and who trembles at his word (Is. 66: 2)⁷.

St. Cyprian

Through humility, contrition of heart, and trembling at His words, God will look at us, dwell in us, and turn us into His Holy heavens. But whoever preoccupies himself with formalities of worship, with the spirit of pride and hypocrisy, in him God will never find rest, and in his worship He will not delight. To God, his sacrifices will have the smell of murder, defilement, and

¹ *Serm. On N.T. Lessons 7:6.*

² *On Ps., 122.*

³ *On Ps., 99.*

⁴ *On Ps. 132.*

⁵ *On Ps. 104.*

⁶ *In John hom 7:1.*

⁷ *Ep. 6:3.*

of idol worship. He says, ***“He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog’s neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine’s blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol.” (Is. 66: 3)***

❖ An (Animal) sacrifice does not sanctify man, as God is in no need of a sacrifice; it is the pure conscience of him who offers it that sanctifies the sacrifice. That will move God to accept it¹.

St. Irenaeus

The fruit of preoccupation with spiritless formalities, is entering into troubles with no comfort. And in place of being told by God: ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name.” (Is. 43: 1)***

He would say to them: ***“Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their delusions, and bring their fears on them, because when I called no one answered, when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight” (Is. 66: 3, 4)***

As they choose the evil way and find pleasure in uncleanness, hated by God, God would forsake them to their delusions, to fall under troubles He brings on them, as fruits of their doings. As they reject His invitation, and do not hear His voice, He does not listen to their prayers, and does not respond to their quests. They will drink from the same cup that they themselves filled.

2. DISCERNMENT BETWEEN FORMAL AND SERIOUS WORSHIPPERS

While formal worshippers suffer troubles with no comfort; those who are serious in their lives and tremble at the word of God, may face execution, yet enjoy real joy.

“Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His word: Your brethren who hated you, who cast you out for My name’s sake said, ‘Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy, but they shall be ashamed.’” (Is. 66: 5) This is what happened when the Jews hated the Lord’s disciples and apostles, at the pretence of zeal for God’s glory and the Mosaic Law, yet the disciples rejoiced, while the Jews got ashamed. The Lord Christ referred to that saying, ***“They will put you out of the Synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.” (John 16: 2)***

The fruit of affliction that came upon men of the Church of the New Testament, on the hands of their brethren, was the destruction of the temple on the hands of Titus, as it was written: ***“The sound of noise from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the Lord, who fully repays His enemies.” (Is. 66: 6)***

The opposition ended up in the destruction of the temple, but the temple of the Church of the New Testament, was established in every heart that bears fruit, which is the transfiguration of the Lord of glory - Jesus Christ, in the inner life of every believer. The prophet tells us here about

¹ Adv. Haer. 4:18:3.

the initiation of that Church in an exalted way, saying, *“Before she travailed, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child. Who has heard such thing? Who has seen such thing?”* (Is. 66: 7, 8) This delivery is nothing but the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ in the believers’ life

Fathers of the Church look at the spiritual life of a Christian after his baptism, as a condition of growth of Christ Himself within his heart, as though a mother to Him¹.

- ❖ As a child develops inside the womb it seems as though the word of God develops in the heart of a soul that received baptism, to comprehend inside it the word of faith, more glorified, and clearer².
- ❖ It seems wrong to speak of the incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin St. Mary, and not to refer to His likewise incarnation in the Church... It is fitting for every one of us to realize that the Son of God came in flesh through the pure Virgin; and at the same time, He came in Spirit in each one of us³.

Origen

- ❖ What happened to the blameless St. Mary, when the perfection of deity that is in Christ shone in her, is being realized in every soul that practices virginity as a personal program. Indeed the Lord will no more come in flesh: *“While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5: 6); yet He dwells in us spiritually, and brings with Him His Father, as He told us in the Holy Bible.
- ❖ By that, every Christian can be as though a (mother) to Him, who is in essence everything; according to what is said by the Lord Himself: *“Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My...mother.”* (Matthew 12: 50)⁴

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ Every Christian (conceives) God in his heart⁵.

St Augustine

- ❖ He summons the soul that starts to head toward the Lord Christ, as such: ‘O, Mary.’ That is, it receives the name of the woman who conceived Him in her womb; namely, that soul will deliver Him according to a spiritual concept⁶.

¹ Hugo Rahner: *our Lady and the Church*, p. 72.

² *In Exod. Hom. 10:4.*

³ *De Sargiusga 8:2.*

⁴ *De Virginitate, 2:13; PG. 46:324, 380..*

⁵ *Sermon 181:4.*

⁶ *De Virginitate, 4:20 ; PL. 16:271.*

❖ Be sure to do the will of the Father, so as to be a (mother) to Christ (Matthew 12: 50)¹.

St. Ambrose

The catholic (universal) Church has been strongly born, as though in one day; as it is said: **“Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once?” (Is. 66: 8)** It was born on the day of the Pentecost, and grew at a fantastic rate.

3. THE NEW JERUSALEM

The prophet ends his talk, revealing the New Jerusalem:

a. She floods joy on her beloved, those who mourn for her, because of the afflictions she goes through (Is. 66: 10). From the outside, there are sufferings and troubles, while the inside is a flood of joy, even on others.

b. She floods satisfaction on all; to children she grants comforts, as though consolation of her bosom, while to grownups, she gives the juice of her glory.

c. A flood of peace as a river, and of great glory as a flowing stream: **“For thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed. On her sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on her knees” (Is. 66: 12)**

God Himself floods peace over His Church, as a farmer irrigates His field. He irrigates her from the fountains of His peace and glory, as though from an inexhaustible river.

❖ In His promise to the righteous He says that He is going to flood on them a river of peace... through which we shall all flourish and be satisfied; even on earthly bodies, He will flood the peace of eternity and incorruption.... It is as though God pours (Himself), to make humans equal to angels².

St. Augustine

d. A source of divine comfort: **“As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”(Is. 66: 13)** God grants His Church motherhood, not only towards the believers of her children, but to all humans; to carry a big heart like her Groom, to flood love on all.

As a mother, she gives comfort to her children, especially those suffering and cross-bearers. That comfort is not her own, but it is the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in her. That is the way the Lord says He will comfort us.

The people of the Old Testament found their comfort in Jerusalem on two aspects. That

¹ *Comm. On Luke 10:25 ; Pl. 15:1810.*

² *City of God 20:21.*

they returned from captivity, and that the Lord dwells in their midst. For those of the New Testament, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit grants us His comforts through conquest over the enemy, the destroyer of our freedom, and through making us a dwelling place for the Holy Trinity.

“When you see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like grass. The hand of the Lord shall be known to His servants, and His indignation to His enemies.” (Is. 66: 14)

We see the cross, as in it life appeared and the hand of the Lord shall be known, namely. The Person of the Lord Christ will be revealed, being the hand of the Father... as through Him the love of God the Father has been practically realized through the sacrifice of the cross. In the Church, as we enjoy that, our hearts will rejoice, and our bones will flourish with faith. That is our comfort in the Lord through His Church. He grants us the joy and love of the heavenly heart, and lets our faith grow (bones being the center of the body).

e. A source of purity: ***“Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves to go to the gardens after an idol in the midst, eating swine’s flesh and the abomination and the mouse, shall be consumed together, says the Lord.” (Is. 66: 17) “As the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord.” (Is. 66: 20)***

f. The glory of God will be proclaimed among the Gentiles (Is. 66: 18-20).

g. A priestly city: ***“I will also take some of them for priests and Levites” (Is. 66: 21).***

h. An everlasting city: ***“So shall your descendants and your name remain” (Is. 66: 22).***

i. A people who will always worship Him: ***“And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,’ says the Lord.” (Is. 66: 23)***

l. No one will perish among them, except for those outside the true Jerusalem: ***“And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” (Is. 66: 24)***

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