

A Patristic Commentary



THE BOOK OF 1 Kings

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A COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST BOOK OF THE KINGS

By

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST AND SECOND BOOKS OF THE KINGS

The Holy Book is not a historical record of certain events concerning a specific nation or people, but it is a talk that touches the kingdom of God among His people, and His kingdom within every human soul. Even if it parades the history of Israel before and after the division, it actually parades God's dealings with us, and reveals to us a fact that touches our depths, namely, to receive God our Savior – a King over our hearts, to ordain our whole life, until we reach the fellowship of His glories.

We know from the book of Genesis of the presence of kings of Edom before the existence of Israel; but, while the glory of this world goes away like grass, the kingdom of God endures forever, as the Lord Christ, the Son of David, came to reign forever, and to set His believers, kings who enjoy the fellowship of His glory.

The first and second books of Samuel came as an introduction to the two books of the kings, to tell us the origin of the royal government in king Saul, and the origin of the royal household in David, for which the first and second books of kings specifically cared, as from it, the Word of God came incarnate.

The topic of the first and second books of the kings:

The first and the second books of the kings are originally one book, that tell us the story of the royal household of David, with the realization of the divine promise to David to set

his son Solomon a king, who would build the temple of God. But the unfaithfulness of Solomon, and the foolishness of his son Rehoboam, led to the division of kingdom.

These two books cover a period of 455 years from the year 1015 to the year 560 B.C.; namely, from the enthronement of Solomon until the reign of Evil-Merodach king of Babylon (son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar) (2 kings 25: 27-30). This period could be divided into three stages:

(1) **The first stage**: (1015 to 975 B.C): covers the reign of king Solomon on a united kingdom that embraced the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Kings 1-11).

- a- The beginning of his reign (1 – 2)
- b- The growth of his power and glory (3: 1 – 5: 14); Building and dedicating the temple (5: 15 – 9: 9); Caring for establishing a commercial maritime fleet (10); And the extension of his reputation and wealth on an exalted world-wide level (10).
- c- The beginning of his rolling down because of his marriage to a multitude of foreign women, and of idol-worship (11), which caused his heart to turn away from God. And ended up in the rebellion of ten tribes of Israel against the house of David.

(2) **The second stage**: (975 to 722 B.C.): that begins by the division of the kingdom into two kingdoms that lived side by side, sometimes in controversy and struggle, and other times in alliance; a period that ended up by the collapse of the kingdom of Israel (of the ten tribes) on the hands of the Assyrians.

This period began by the revolt of the ten tribes against David's royal kingdom, and the establishment of an independent kingdom. The two kingdoms (Israel and Judah) passed through three stages:

- a- Enmity between the two kingdoms from the days of Jeroboam, king of Israel (12: 1 – 28: 16).
- b- Friendship and intermarriage between the two royal kingdoms in the days of Ahab and his children, until the perdition of Joram, king of Israel and Ahaziah, king of Judah on the hand of Jehu (16: 29 – 2 Kings 10).
- c- Renewal of the enmity between the two kingdoms from the day Jehu reigned over Israel, and Athaliah over Judah, until the destruction of the kingdom of Israel in the sixth year of the reign of Hezekiah over Judah (11 – 17).

(3) **The third stage:** (722 560 B.C.), embracing the period of continuity of the kingdom of Judah until its total destruction on

the hands of the Babylonians who carried the people captives to Babylon, It extended until the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin in captivity.

Important historical events:

The four centuries covered by the first and the second books of the kings constituted a period of continuous disturbances in the old world, and of transfer of the world powers.

The Assyrian threat has been extremely violent through the last fifty years of the kingdom of Israel (the Northern kingdom). The Assyrian state in the days of 'Tiglath Pileser the third' carried out three destructive attacks against Israel in the years 732, 733, and 734 B.C. And the kingdom of Israel utterly fell under the Assyrian dominion, and was captivated ten years later (722 B.C.) in the days of 'Sargon the second'.

Concerning the kingdom of Judah, although Syria and Assyria threatened it every now and then, yet the most destructive and violent enemy has been Babylon, that captivated it three times in the years 605, 597, and 588 B.C. The last siege lasted two years, and ended up in the utter falling down of Jerusalem in the year 587 B.C., the destruction of the temple, and the captivation of thousands from Judah to Babylon.

The two books of the kings:

- 1- The first book of the kings starts by King David, and the second book ends up by the reign of Babylon.
- 2- The first book of the kings starts by building the temple of the Lord; and the second book ends up by its destruction.
- 3- The first book of the kings starts by the first successor of king David – Solomon – and the second book ends up by the last one – Jehoiachin – who was taken captive to Babylon.

The prophetic work in the era of the kings:

The first and the second books of the kings actually constitute a parade of God's dealings with His people, on the level of the leaderships, as well as that of the common people. According to some, the two books of the kings are in their depths, two prophetic and instructive books. Beside being historical books, their goal, through history, is to present prophecy and instruction; Although that period of four centuries, has been the era of the kingdom, whether united or divided; yet, according to the prophets, it was the period of the reign of God Himself through the kings; the period of the divine reign.

A theocratic royal system:

God is the true unseen King of a people, who enjoy His covenant, and ought to abide to it. God commanded the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul the first king over Israel; then to anoint David a king in his place, on account of he that "he was a man after God's own heart". ... God sent the prophet Nathan to king David with a divine promise "*to establish the throne of his kingdom forever*" (2 Samuel 7: 13). And when David committed iniquity, Nathan came to threaten him with punishment from the Lord; Yet, when David confessed his sin and repented, he proclaimed the divine forgiveness and blessings (2 Samuel 12: 1-15; 24: 11-19).... And through the prophet Nathan, Solomon was chosen a successor of his father David on the throne (2 Samuel 12: 25); and had a role in resisting Adonijah, Solomon's eldest son, who attempted to take the throne by force (2 Kings 1).

"The Lord is King forever and ever; The nations have perished out of His land" (Psalm 10: 16).

"For the kingdom is the Lord's; and He rules over the nations" (Psalm 22: 28).

"Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in. Who is the king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates, and lift them up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory" (Psalm 24: 7-10).

"The Lord sits as King forever" (Psalm 29: 10).

"You are my King, O God; Command victories for Jacob" (Psalm 44: 4).

"For the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47: 2).

"God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne" (Psalm 47: 8).

By that, God draws our attention to His kingdom in us, to see all races worship Him.

+ All races of the world will worship Him inside their hearts, *"For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations"*. The kingdom is the Lord's, and not that of the proud man.

(St. Augustine)

The growth of the prophets' role:

Prophets had a vital and prominent role in the life of the good and wicked kings: They supported the former, and daringly and strongly resisted the later; proclaiming the will of God to kings and people, that it was said about Elija and Elisha *"The chariot of Israel, and its horsemen"*.

When a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, *"Elisha saw it, and he cried out: 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and its horsemen; and he saw him no more" (2 kings 2: 11, 12).*

"Elisha had become ill with the illness of which he would die. Then Joash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over his face, and said, 'O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and their horsemen"(2 kings 13: 14)

When king Solomon was holy for God, God Himself appeared to him in a vision at Gibeon, directly after his enthronement; then appeared to him again after the dedication of the temple, and promised him to respond to his prayers, and that his kingdom would endure forever, if he is faithful in keeping His divine commandments (1 Kings 3: 5; 9: 1, etc.). But when Solomon did not keep God's covenant and His statutes which He has commanded him, God, Himself, did not appear to him, but sent a prophet to threaten him (1 Kings 11: 11), probably 'Ahija' who promised 'Jeroboam' to reign over ten tribes (1 Kings 11: 29). After the division of the kingdom, the work of the prophets became stronger in resisting the apostasy, and prophesying desolation to dwell upon the two kingdoms.

When Ahab the son of Omri, king of Israel, and his wife Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon dedicated their energies to destroy the worship of God, and to establish that of the Phoenician Baal, *"Elijah arose, a prophet like fire, and his words burned like a torch"* (Sirach 48: 1). Yes, the kingdom of Judah had deflected to mixing the divine worship with the heathen one, Yet the kingdom of Israel has been more in need of fiery prophets to warn the leaderships and the people, and to fight against idol-worship from the start of the kingdom to its end.

The main role of the prophet has been to confirm that the whole life of the kingdom is set upon the extent of abidance to, or breaking the covenant with God. Hence, the prophets came to present the divine promises, threats, and warnings, confirming that the future of the kingdom depends upon the tendencies and behavior of the king, his men, and his people.

The two books of the kings confirm that the Word of God will never become void; but the power of God will appear in the realization of His Word, proclaimed through His prophets, to conform the history of His people.

The Davidic Covenant:

The Holy Book reveals God's longing to set a covenant with every human soul, as well as with the holy congregation as a whole. Since the fall of Adam, we see God in every generation set a covenant with His beloved creature, until the day came in which the

Lord proclaimed on the cross: "*It is finished*" (John 19: 33). Through these two books we can discover some of the dimensions of the covenant with God:

- (1) This covenant bears two integrated aspects: the personal relationship of the believer, faithful in his life, with God; And the relationship of the collective church life with God; as the believer is a member in the house of God, the holy catholic church
- (2) There is no partiality with God. If God had set a covenant with David, as a personal relationship with him; on account of that David was "*God's servant*" (2 Samuel 7: 8), and "*a man after God's own heart*" (1 Samuel 13: 14); even though David bears his own weaknesses, Yet he knew how to repent with a spirit of humility, to wet his bed with his tears, to have his sin ever before him, and to pray to God to "*restore to him the joy of His salvation*" (psalm 51: 12). David became a living role model for everyone walking along the path of the Lord.
- (3) God cherishes this covenant with His servant David, and will stay faithful to it even after the departure of the believer from this world, as is shown in His talk to Solomon the son of David, and to some of the kings of Judah. Having been faithful in his relationship with God, God paid David back in his own life, and that of his children and grandchildren after him.
- (4) With God's faithfulness to David, even in His relationship with his children and grandchildren; The believers, on their part, should have the serious commitment to keep the covenant as much as they could. It is noticed in these two books, when they talk about one of the good kings of Judah, it is said that he was like his father David in keeping the statutes of God, and faithfulness to Him; Whereas, when they talk about a wicked king, it is said that he was unlike his father David. In His longsuffering upon Solomon the son of David, and the rest of his grandchildren, God was not partial to David, nor to any of them, but to give them the chance to repent and to follow the lead of their great ancestor in his relationship with God. He postpones the chastisement hoping for the return of the fallen.

(5) According to God's promise, the royal dynasty of David endured along the generations, and was not utterly cut off, the way it was with the first king of Israel, Saul the son of Kish. The two books of the kings showed the fruit of faithfulness and that of breaking the covenant of God. For the sake of Solomon's initial faithfulness to God's covenant, he was granted the heavenly wisdom, whereas breaking it later in his life, led to the division of the kingdom in the days of his son Rehoboam. Although the two books of the kings present an extremely sorrowful portrait of some of the kings of Judah, yet they bear, as well, a distinct line that confirms God's care to realize the promise He has given to king David through His prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7: 12-16). Although God chastised the seed of Solomon because of their wickedness, yet He kept a portion of the tribes of Israel (those of Judah and Benjamin) under the reign of David's royal family, kept Jerusalem, the chosen city, as the capital of the kingdom, and there were certain children of David who reigned along the generations, up to the day of the Babylonian captivity, which happened on account of their corruption. Ultimately, so as not to deprive the seed of David of enjoying the continuity of the royal dynasty, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, came to reign over the hearts, and to carry His people to the bosom of God the Father, being the King of Kings who came to set the fallen tent of David, and to stay a King forever. . Yes indeed, God promised Jeroboam saying *"if you heed all that I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you, and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you"* (1 Kings 11: 37, 38). Yet, neither Jeroboam, nor any of his successors realized that condition. However God was longsuffering on the kings and the dissenting tribes of Israel, warned and threatened his chastisement on them by His prophets; And even granted them certain privileges every now and then, for the sake of His covenant with Abraham (2 Kings 13: 23).

The Law:

The two books of the kings came to present a measure of events and history through the obedience or the disobedience of the king and his people to the divine statutes, which would set the life of the kingdom.

The main problems:

In the promised land, the people of Israel confronted many problems, the most prominent of which were:

- (1) Mixing between the worship of the true God (Jehovah), and the gods of the Canaanites. Although the Jewish people have experienced the Mighty hand of God in their exodus from the land of Egypt, caring for them while crossing the wilderness, and supporting them to overcome the peoples who lived before them in the promised land; Yet, once they possessed the land flowing with milk and honey; which does not depend upon a great river like the Nile, but upon the rain; they started to wonder whether Jehovah could grant fertility to the plants and crops. Finding out how the Canaanites used to worship the gods of rain and fertility; the Israelites, in order to have the benefit from all sides, chose to mix between the worship of Jehovah, and that of the heathen gods.
- (2) Intermarriage with the heathen Canaanite women; who played a serious role in provoking their Israeli men, and eventually the whole people, to bind to gods and goddesses of fertility with all their abominations.

Behind the mental or practical atheism; or behind the escape of the people from encountering God, there were two causes: The first was their preoccupation with material issues, beside a lack of trust in the Almighty and Beneficent God; And the second was the carnal covetousness that provoked them not to consecrate marriage as a divine gift.

Women in the two books of the kings:

Some scholars concentrate on the leaderships, kings in particular, whether good or wicked, like Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Ahab, Menasseh, Josiah, Assa, etc. Others concentrate on the highly active spiritual personalities, like the prophets Elijah, and Elisha, But only few of them perceived how the two books cared for the role played by the women in the society; how the wicked Jezebel provoked her man (king Ahab),

men of the state, and all the people toward idol-worship, and corruption, through dedicating all the energies of the state to the account of evil. The two books have, however, showed the importance of the role played by many women, like that played by Bathsheba to ensure the enthronement of her son Solomon; Queen Sheba, Jeroboam's wife, the widow whose oil and dough the prophet Elijah blessed, the captive Israeli girl who testified to her living God before her heathen masters, and that of the wife of Naaman the Syrian, etc.

The books of history in the era of the kings

The book	The topic of the book	The lord Christ in the book
1 Samuel	The human choice: Saul	+ Anointed a Prophet, a Priest, a King, and an Intercessor + Sits on the throne of His father David, and reigns forever (Luke 1: 32)
2 Samuel	The divine choice: David	The covenant with David (7) a symbol of the Messianic covenant for the whole world.
1 kings	Solomon and Israel	+ Christ, The King of peace and glory, The Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1: 30) + The Builder of the house of God (Ephesians 2: 20-22) + The King of kings (Revelation 19: 16)
2 Kings	Kings of Israel	Christ, the Controller of history, who proclaims His plan and goal concerning His people
1 Chronicles	Solomon and the temple	Christ the king is greater than David
2 Chronicles	The kings and the temple	Who cares to purify His temple, to reform and to heal every weakness

ISRAEL AND THR ROYAL SYSTEM

The heart, and not the system:

Neither the location nor the system creates the saints, but the fellowship with God.

a- Under the Theocratic system, where God reigns on His people through men of religion, there were spiritual, godly, and wise leaderships, Like the prophet Moses, and Joshua the son of Nun; Godly judges, the prophet Samuel in particular; And there were, as well, pitch dark periods, during which *“everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 21: 25).

b- Under the royal system: The prophet Moses prophesied that, when the people of God get to the promised land, they would say: “Let us have a king over us like all the nations that are around us” (Deuteronomy 17: 14). That prophecy was eventually realized; And when the prophet Samuel was displeased to hear their request (1 Samuel 8: 6), the Lord said to him: *“Head the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them”* (1 Samuel 8: 7).

In this system there were kings with different tendencies:

- 1- Saul: who was set according to human choice, because of whom many have perished.
- 2- David: who came a fruit of the prayers of the prophet Samuel, and according to the will of God. Despite his own weaknesses, he had a pure heart; and from his seed came “the King of kings”, the incarnate Word of God.
- 3- Solomon: who, requesting wisdom from God to lead his people, God gave it to him, beside glory and riches; and he got the privilege of building the temple of God in Jerusalem. But, once he got slothful, and married heathen women, he deflected to idol-worship.

- 4- Rehoboam: the son of Solomon the Sage, who foolishly rejected the counsel of the wise elders; and consequently the kingdom in his time was divided into two: The kingdom of Judah, embracing two tribes: Judah and Benjamin; its capital Jerusalem, with the temple of God; and its 19 kings of the family of David, except for queen Athaliah. That kingdom lasted 135 years; And the kingdom of Israel, embracing the other 10 tribes; also called 'Ephraim', on account of that it was the largest tribe in number and area of land.
- c- Under the divided kingdom: There were the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and other prophets, beside a few good kings, like Josiah and Hezekiah.
- d- In the land of captivity: Great prophets appeared, like Ezekiel and Daniel, and great leaders, like Nehemiah, and Zerubabel, who led those who returned to Jerusalem.

In the era of kings, most of the kings of the kingdom of Israel were wicked; whereas some of the kings of the kingdom of Judah were good kings. Hence God allowed for Israel to be captivated by Assyria. And instead of getting a lesson from what happened to her sister kingdom Israel, Judah committed more horrible evils, to end up falling captives under the Babylonians three times. And there, in captivity, the two peoples: Israel and Judah got together as one people under chastisement.

In the days of Cyrus the Persian king, the Jews returned to Israel, where they came to know no independence; being submitted to the Persian occupation, then to the Greek, and finally to the Roman. They were anticipating the coming of the Messiah, the King who would set the fallen tent of David, and give them dominion over the whole world. And when the Son of David came to set His spiritual kingdom, they rejected and crucified Him.... During that period of foreign occupation, there were found the Maccabees, as true witnesses amid the bitter persecution.

The books of history in general, and those concerning the royal system in particular, confirm that history is in the hand of God; He who works on the realization of His promises to men, despite their unfaithfulness.

A LIST OF THE Kings of Israel

B.C.

1050 Saul
1010 David
970 Solomon

Judah (The Southern Kingdom)
Kingdom)

Israel (The Northern

931	Rehoboam (931 – 915)	Jeroboam I (931 –
910		
915	Abijam (915 – 912)	
912	Asa (912 – 871)	
910		Nadab (910 – 909)
909		Baasha (909 – 886
886		Elah (886 – 885)
885		Tibni and Omri (886 –
881)		
881		Omri (881 – 874)
875	Jehoshaphat (875 – 850)	
874		Ahab (874 – 852)
852		Joram (852 – 850)
850	Jehoram (850 – 843)	Ahaziah (850 – 842)
843	Ahaziah (843 – 842)	
842	Athaliah (842 – 836)	Jehu (842 – 814)
836	Jehoash (Joash) (836 – 797)	
816		Jehoahaz (816 800)
800		Joash (800 – 785)
799	Amaziah (799 – 771)	
785	Azariah (Ozziah) (785 – 834)	Jeroboam II (785 – 745)
751	Jotham (751 – 736)	

745		Zechariah (745 – 744)
744		Shallum (744)
744		Menahem (744 – 735)
736	Ahaz (736 – 721)	
735		Pekahiah (735 – 734)
734		Pekah (16 years with
	others, and 4 years alone 734 – 730)	
730		Hoshea (730 – 722)
721	Hezekiah (721 – 693) – Isaiah	
722		Fall of Samaria
693	Manasseh (693 – 639)	
639	Amon (639 – 638)	
638	Josiah (638 – 608) – Zephaniah	
639	Jehoahaz (Shalom) – 608 Jeremiah	
608	Jehoiakim (Eliakim) (608 – 597)	
597	Jehoiachin (Jeknia) (597) – Ezekiel	
597	Zedekiah (Mattaniah) (597 – 587)	
587	Fall of Jerusalem	

Two books presented to you:

The goal of these two books is not to present a historical parade of an old kingdom and of kings who passed away, but it is a personal talk addressed to every man, to live by faith, in obedience to the commandment of God, and in faithfulness to the covenant presented by our Lord Jesus Christ, by His blood on the cross.

The two books present to us both good and wicked kings, to make us learn from the positives as well as from the negatives

From David, the godly king; Solomon the Sage; Rehoboam the foolish; Abijam the courageous; Asa the upright; Jehoshaphat the pious; Jehoram the wicked; Ahaziah the defiler of the sanctuaries; Jehoash the apostate; Amaziah the arrogant; Azariah with his imperfect pure heart; Jotham the peace-lover; Ahaz the idol-worshipper; Hezekiah the reformer; Manasseh the repentant; Amon the vague; Josiah the amiable; Jehoahaz;

Jehoiakim; Jehoiakin; and Zedekiah; all of whom, by whose wickedness, caused the kingdom of Judah to fall into the Babylonian captivity.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST BOOK OF THE KING

The first and the second books of the kings were previously one book in the Hebrew origin, then were divided into two books when it was translated to the Greek language (the Septuagint version), on account of that the translated text is larger by one third. The two books are considered together an extension of the first and second books of Samuel. Over the Southern kingdom 20 kings reigned; and over the Northern kingdom 19 kings reigned. The book reveals how apostasy could destroy the people of God, and would make them lose their unity and peace; while God, remaining faithful, chastens to save.

The goal of the book:

(1) The historic books confirm that *“which has been is what will be; that which is done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun”* (Ecclesiastes 1: 9). The soul which binds to the Lord Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, as her Groom, is drawn by the Holy Spirit, from under the sun, to the continuous renewal of the inner mind, not to feel any boredom, but lives exultant by the Spirit as though in heaven, not to be touched by old age or the passing of time.

+ God being perfect, became a perfect Man, and brought everything new to perfection. That is the only new thing under the sun, through which the exalted might of God was proclaimed.

(Father John of Damascus)

(2) History is in the hand of God; and all the events, particularly those that touch the people of God, are to be theologically interpreted. As long as the people keep the covenant of God, they would enjoy security and peace; Whereas if they break the covenant, and deflect from faith, they would be brought under intense pressure.

The kingdom would stay strong as long as it abides to the true King (Micah 4: 13), who grants it mercy, help, and glory; Whereas in case it deflects away from Him, it collapses and falls under chastisement. Behind the division is a sin abiding in the heart. The main line in the two books of the kings is the confirmation that the peace and prosperity of Israel and Judah are set upon the faithfulness of the people and the king, and their honesty in keeping the covenant of God

- (3) It keeps for us the true genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ, as it came in the gospel according to St. Matthew the Evangelic.
- (4) Our 'Solomon' – the Lord Christ – leads every believer to enjoy the perfection of heavenly blessings, as long as he has the perfect and undivided heart with God.
- (5) Solomon realized what David could not; namely, building the temple of God; on account of that the hand of David has been too preoccupied with many wars, to be able to dedicate his time and effort to building the Lord's house. Yet, as Solomon's heart was not as perfect as his father's heart (11: 4, 6, 33. 38), the kingdom was divided in the days of his son Rehoboam.
- (6) In the glory and collapse of the kingdom of Solomon, we see a shadow of the setting and collapse of the kingdom of Christ inside us.
- (7) The evaluation of the kings were bound to two personalities: David, the good king (9: 4; 11: 4, 33, 38; 14: 8; 15: 3; 15: 11); and Jeroboam, the wicked king; the expression "the sins of Jeroboam", or "the way of Jeroboam" was repeated eight times.
- (8) In this book, appears the role of the altar in solving all problems.
- (9) The two books of the kings present to us a serious lesson about the collective faith. Beside the commitment of the believer to his personal relationship with God; he, as a member of the people of God, is committed to work together with his brethren to the account of the kingdom of God. The divine righteousness

supports the soul, sanctifies the whole being of man, and blesses the people and grants them conquest and success; whereas sin destroys the peoples.

The author:

It was probably written by Ezra the scribe; or, according to the Jewish tradition, it was probably written by the prophet Jeremiah, gathered together from historic resources, like the Acts of Solomon (11: 41); the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel (14: 19; 16: 5, 14; 22: 39); and the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (14: 29; 15: 7, 23; 22: 45). It is obvious that there were plenty of historic records from which the author has drawn his material under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

History and location of its writing:

As the first temple was still there, the first and second books of the kings were written at a location within Palestine, probably in Jerusalem.

The key of the book:

Chapter 12 is considered the turning point of the book, when the kingdom, after the death of king Solomon was divided into two kingdoms. The key of the book, is the divine saying to Solomon: *"Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you; and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel'"* (9: 4, 5).

And the divine saying to him, *"Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes , which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you, and give it to your servant. Nevertheless, I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son"*(11: 11, 12).

Christ in the first book of the kings:

- * The Lord Christ is seen as “the King of kings” and “the Lord of lords”.

- * Solomon was the ‘Sage’ or ‘the wise man’ (3: 16-28); the author of proverbs, praises, and poems. The Lord Christ, on the other hand, is ‘Wisdom of God’ (Luke 11: 31; 1 Corinthians 1: 30). According to St. Cyril the Great: [That woman – the queen of Sheba – although a barbarian, yet she vehemently sought the wisdom of Solomon; ... As for you, although the Wisdom Himself is present among you; He who came to talk to you about the unseen heavenly issues, confirming His talk by wonders and miracles; yet you carelessly forsake the Word, and the amazing nature of His teachings].

- * Solomon built the temple, the house of God, instead of the tabernacle of the meeting; as a symbol of the body of Christ (John 2: 19-22); and of the church, the body of Christ and His temple (1 Corinthians 3: 16, 17; 6: 19, 20).

- * Solomon enjoyed an exalted glory:
 In building and furnishing the temple, estimated by some, according to the year 1980 standard, to cost around 240 billion dollars.
 In building his own palace (7: 1-12; John 14: 1-3).
 In establishing his kingdom (2: 12; Colossians 1: 13; 2 Peter 1: 11).
 In his wisdom (3: 12; 4: 29-34; 1 Corinthians 1: 30).

Yet, despite all that glory, the Lord Christ says, while holding a lily from the field:
“Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6: 29); by which He intends for us to perceive that: *“No flesh should glory in His presence”* (1 Corinthians 1: 29).

The kingdom of Solomon and the kingdom of Christ:

- * A vast and extended kingdom (4: 20, 21); and (Psalm 91: 71: 8)
- * A kingdom of peace (4: 24, 25; 5: 4); and (Psalm 72: 7)

- * A kingdom of discipline and understanding (4: 29-31); and (Psalm 72: 11-16)
- * A kingdom of justice (10: 8, 9); and (Psalm 72: 1-4, 12-14)
- * A kingdom of riches and prosperity (10: 17, 27); and (Psalm 16, 72: 10).

The church in the first book of the kings:

While king David set aside all the material needed for building the temple, his son Solomon did the actual building.

While God the Father set everything for the salvation of men; His only-begotten Son did the salvation work; established the church of God, His holy temple; established it upon Himself – the Rock and Foundation – It came to be a living spiritual building (John 6: 37, 44; Matthew 16: 18; Ephesians 2: 20-22)

The scholar Origen was the first to proclaim the church as the city of God here on earth, to exist side by side with the civil state.

+ It is obvious that Christ describes the church as being a spiritual house, the house of God. And the apostle Paul teaches saying:

[You should know how to behave in the house of the Lord, His church, the pillar and foundation of the truth. For, if the church is the house of

God; and on account of that what belongs to the Father also belongs to the Son, the church is, therefore, the house of the Son of God].

(The scholar Origen)

The apostle Paul portrays the church as “*a building of Christ, that grows into a holy temple in the Lord*” (Ephesians 2: 21, etc). And the scholar Origen talks of the church as the spiritual temple of God, saying:

+ The Spirit of Christ dwells in those who bear His likeness and features; He Himself, promising the righteous, plainly and clearly says: “*I will dwell in them, and walk among them; I will be their God, and they shall be My people*” (2 Corinthians 6: 16; Leviticus 26: 12; Jeremiah 3: 33; 32: 38; Zechariah 8: 8); And,

"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)

Somewhere else in the Holy Book, it speaks about the secret of resurrection for those whose ears are divinely opened, and says that the temple which is totally destroyed is newly rebuilt of living and precious stones. That makes us understand that everyone of those who are led by the word of God, to strive together along the godly way, is a precious stone in the newly rebuilt great temple of God.

Hence, the apostle Peter says: *"You also as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 2: 5). And according to the apostle Paul: *"Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone"* (Ephesians 2: 20); And there is a concealed hint of that in what the prophet Isaiah addresses Jerusalem, saying: *"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. All your children shall be taught by the Lord; and great shall be the peace of your children"* (Isaiah 54: 11-13).

Therefore, among the righteous, there are those who are colorful gems, blue sapphires, rubies, crystals, and every kind of precious stones.

(The scholar Origen)

The temple of the Lord:

- * These two books reveal the role of the temple of God in the life of the people of God.
- * Despite the faithfulness of David in his relationship with God, he was not allowed to build the house of the Lord, on account of that he was a man of war. His son Solomon was allowed by God to build it, as a heavenly divine gift for the sake of his wisdom.

- * In the first book of the kings, three chapters describe the details of the temple building; and the eighth chapter for its dedication.
- * The greatest sin committed by Jeroboam was that he built two temples at Bethel and Dan, to keep his people from going up to worship at the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.
- * Of the prominent features of the good kings of Judah in the sight of the Lord, was that they worshipped the Lord in His temple in Jerusalem, carried offerings to it, cared for its repair, and took away any heathen worship that was introduced into it by their wicked predecessors.
- * To proclaim His chastisement on His people, God allowed foreign nations to enter into His house, to defile it, and to confiscate its treasures. And ultimately, to reveal the extent of His wrath on his people, He allowed for the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians.

The main topics in the first book of the kings:

The king: His strength lies in keeping the divine covenant; He has the divine word, the priest, the prophet, and the counselors.

The temple: Its sanctity lies in the dwelling of God in the heart.

The counsel: No man can live without the counsel of the wise.

Other gods: conform their worshippers according to their likeness.

The message of the prophet: He expresses the unflattering voice of God.

The main personalities:

- 1- David: His care about the divine commandment.
- 2- Solomon: Wise and Sage, yet he ultimately deflected.
- 3- Rehoboam: rejected the wise council of the elders (Proverb 11: 14; 15: 22; 24: 6).
- 4- Jeroboam: Abused the truth.
- 5- Elijah: God sets faithful witnesses for Himself.
- 6- Ahab: A king dominated by his heathen wife.
- 7- Jezebel: Dedicated all her energies for evil.

The main cities:

- 1- Shechem: where the ten tribes gathered together (12), enthroned Rehoboam a king, and made it the capital of Israel.
- 2- Dan: One of two centers of worship, where Jeroboam put a golden calf in each, to become alternatives to Jerusalem (12: 29); one in the north and the other in the south.
- 3- Bethel: Near Jerusalem, where Jeroboam put the second golden calf.
- 4- Tirzah: Baasha killed Nadab, became king over Israel, and moved the capital from Shechem to Tirza (15: 32).
- 5- Samaria: When Omri became a king, he purchased a hill on which he built a new capital. His son Ahab was the worst of the kings of Israel, whose wife Isabel worshipped Baal (16: 23-34).
- 6- Mount Carmel: There, the prophet Elijah challenged and killed the prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth on Mount Carmel (17)
- 7- Jezreel: After killing the prophets of Baal, Elijah went to Jezreel; Then when Jezebel vowed to kill him, he escaped from there, but God cared for him and encouraged him. On his way, he anointed the two kings to Aram (Syria) and Israel; and anointed Elisha a prophet after him (19: 1- 21).
- 8- Ramoth Gilead: The king of Aram (Syria) declared war against the northern kingdom, but was defeated in two battles. When the Aramites occupied Ramoth Gilead, Ahab and Jehoshaphat joined forces to retrieve the city. Ahab was killed in the battle, then Jehoshaphat also died (20: 1; 22: 53).

DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK:

This book speaks about the reign of Solomon; building the temple; the exaltation of Solomon's royal court; the golden era in the Hebrew history; the division and collapse of the kingdom; the apostasy of the northern kingdom; and the appearance of the prophet Elijah.

(1) The first division: The united kingdom: 1 – 12

- 1- Solomon's glory:

- a- Solomon enthroned a king, and his kingdom established 1, 2
- b- Solomon seeks wisdom from God 3
- c- Solomon manages his kingdom 4
- d- Solomon builds and dedicates the temple of God 5 - 8

2- Solomon's downfall:

- a- Solomon's heart turns away from the Lord 11: 1 - 8
- b- God chastises Solomon 11: 9 - 40
- c- Death of Solomon. 11: 41 - 43

(2) The second division: The divided kingdom:

1- The kingdom torn apart:

Rehoboam and Jeroboam 12

2- The kingdom collapses:

- a- Jeroboam 13, 14
- b- Two kings in Judah 15: 1 - 24
- c- Five kings in Israel 15: 25 – 16: 28
- d- Ahab, king of Israel 16: 29 – 22: 40
- e- Jehoshaphat in Judah 22: 41 - 50
- f- Ahaziah in Israel 22: 51 - 53

Solomon the great	Solomon the weak
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1- The prophet Nathan called him 'Jedidiah' (God's beloved) (2 Samuel 12: 25) 2- His throne greater than his father's (1: 46) 3- He enjoyed his father's blessing before his death (2: 1) 4- He sought the heavenly wisdom (3) 5- His kingdom extended to 60,000 square miles (4: 21) (10 times his father's) 6- He built the temple of God (6) 7- So impressed with his person, his servants, and his God, the queen of Sheba had no more spirit in her (10: 5) 8- He wrote the sweetest song of love to God (the book of the Song of songs). 9- He started his royal career with a prayer, and ended it with repentance.	1- Contrary to his father, he killed his brother (2: 24). 2- Like Saul, he fell into pride (10: 18 – 29) 3- His women seduced him to idol-worship (11). 4- He lost his peace with God for sometime (Book of Ecclesiastes)
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AN ANNEX CONCERNING THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

The united kingdom:

Just before the death of David, Adonijah, his son, exalted himself and attempted to set himself a king; but the prophet Nathan informed David, and enthroned Solomon a king (1). Once he became a king, Solomon walked in the fear of God, and enjoyed the heavenly wisdom. In his days Israel extended in area, from the border of Egypt to that of Babylonia; and reached the climax of greatness, to become almost the greatest empire of the time. The divine promise was realized; and peace with richness and glory so prevailed on the kingdom of Israel, to earn the respect and appreciation of the surrounding nations, that the queen of Sheba came all the way to Jerusalem to hear the

wisdom of Solomon. On the religious aspect, Solomon built the temple of God, counted as one of the wonders of the world, put in it the ark of the covenant; and on the day of its dedication, the temple got filled with the glory of God; and Solomon raised a magnificent prayer to God. But his marriage to foreign heathen women, against the commandment of God, provoked him to idol-worship.

The divided kingdom:

After the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam rejected the wise counsel of the elders, chose the foolish counsel of the young men who had grown up with him; violently and arrogantly increased the taxes, provoking Jeroboam to lead a movement of rebellion against him, that ended up in the dissension of ten tribes, and reigning Jeroboam a king on the northern kingdom of Israel. With such a division, a period of chaos and struggle started between two kingdoms and two groups of kings.

The secret behind the division:

According to some scholars, that division was not a recent development, but had its roots since old generations. In Israel, there were two groups:

- (1) One group sought the royal system as a natural and necessary development for a an extended and a well-established nation, after being previously a little nation in bondage, then was liberated to go through a lengthy sojourn in the wilderness, in a nomadic, rather than a civil way of life.

Some leaderships probably saw that the existence of several tribes without a king, opened the door wide for other nations to infiltrate among them, and to have dominion upon them. That was obvious from what came in the first book of Samuel, when the prophet said to Saul: *"After that you shall come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is"* (1 Samuel 10: 5); which indicates that the Philistines dominated the tribes of the center, and set rulers. It went so far that *"there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, 'lest the Hebrews make swords or spears'"* (1 Samuel 13: 19).

According to those leaderships, Israel, formed of a number of tribes, were in need of adopting a well-established royal system, with laws and well organized army, to be counted as the army of the king; and not like the era of the judges, during which a military leader appears every now and then to lead a group of the tribes. ... At that time, as it so happened that certain of the surrounding countries developed into kingdoms, like the Amonites, the Moabites, and the Aramites; The Israelites chose to follow the lead of their cousins; ... The weakness of the great nations like Egypt at the time, did not hinder that natural development.

That issue of royalty was stirred up during the era of judges, before the time of the prophet Samuel, when the Israelites, intending to set 'Gideon' a king over them, said to him: *"Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian"* (Judges 8: 22); but he rejected their request. ... And *"All the men of Shechem made 'Abimelech' a king over them"* (Judges 9: 1); but they, later on, treacherously dealt with him, and the idea of setting a kingdom did not last long.

(2) Another group saw in the royal system some risk on the farmers, from whom the king would most probably *"take the best*

of their fields, their vineyards, and their olive groves, and give them to his servants" (1 Samuel 8: 14); those whose freedom and rights may contradict with the king's "right" to abuse them. He may favor his own tribe, a fact that was actually demonstrated in the case of king Saul, who surrounded himself with an entourage formed of his own son Jonathan, his cousin Abner whom he appointed as the commander of the armed forces; and the officers whose loyalty he guaranteed by granting them fields and vineyards; whom he later on addressed, saying: *"Hear now, you Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give everyone of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?"* (1 Samuel 22: 7). The Holy Book did not say on whose expense that royal generosity has been!

Among the reasons for their opposition against the royal system was probably the controversies between the tribes, which was shown in the episode of the Levite and his concubine, mentioned in the book of Judges 19: 21, in which all the tribes stood

against the tribe of Benjamin; *“when the people came to the house of God, and remained there before God till evening. They lifted up their voices, wept bitterly, and said: ‘O Lord, God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today should be one tribe missing in Israel?’”* (Judges 21: 3). From that same tribe Saul came as the first king over Israel in the days of the prophet Samuel.

That sort of dissension also appeared even after David was anointed a king; for he first reigned over Judah for seven years, being rejected by the tribes of the north; until ‘Abner’ Saul’s commander of the army felt the necessity of gathering all the tribes together under the banner of king David. From then on, David gained favor in the sight of all the tribes, and reigned upon them for as long as 33 years.

There was, as well, some sort of partiality, when Solomon increased the taxes on all the tribes except on Judah, for the sake of the high expenses of building the temple, his own palace, and the other huge establishments on the land of Judah; something that created great resentment among the other tribes, which they could not, for a long time, express by any kind of rebellion. What the prophet ‘Ahijah’ (11) prophesied to ‘Jeroboam’ concerning his reigning over ten tribes, probably tells about that great feeling of resentment among the other tribes because of what they endured of high taxes and forced labor to the account of the king and his tribe. Such resentment has prepared the ten tribes, and gave Jeroboam the chance to lead a revolt against the royal tribe, that was only joined by the tribe of Benjamin, geographically close by.

According to some, even before the royal system, there has been some kind of controversy between the tribes, certain of which (the Northern kingdom), had more tendency toward the ‘Adonaian’ tradition, looking up to God who could save by His might. And certain others (the Southern kingdom) had more tendency toward the ‘Jehovah’ tradition, who looked up to God “Jehovah” who protects His people by dwelling among them and having compassion on them. Yet, there was no sharp line separating between the two traditions; for, tendency toward one tradition did not imply any disregard of the other.

The divided kingdom and the series of sins:

Although Solomon and his son Rehoboam have both sinned, but the division of the kingdom on the hand of Jeroboam led Israel to a series of sins, that went on and on till the time of the Assyrian captivity:

- * A return to the worship of the golden calf; as Jeroboam made two, put one in Bethel, and the other in Dan (12)
- * He invented a feast on his own, to imitate what was going on in Judah.
- * He used the priests of the high places to offer burnt offerings.
- * Deception and falsity crawled even among the elders, as when an elder prophet drew the man of God who came from Judah to warn the people against disobedience (3); who was later devoured later on by a lion.
- * The prophet 'Ahijah' told Jeroboam's wife about the death of her son, and the dethronement of Jeroboam.
- * Jeroboam's successors were as wicked, among whom was Ahab, who got married to Jezebel daughter of the priest of Baal, who dedicated all her energies to provoke the people to Baal worship.
- * The kingdom ultimately ended by the Assyrian captivation, which confirms that the whole history is in the hand of God, who chastises to save; that the apostasy from faith is a deadly worm that completely destroys the tree; And that, as without the sun there would be no life on earth, without God all humanity would be destroyed.
- * Sin brought forth dissension and civil wars; and dissension brought forth sins.
- * In Israel we find no good king; Whereas in Judah we may find some wicked kings, beside some godly and reforming ones.

The Northern kingdom established:

Having been more extended, richer, and more populated than the Southern kingdom, the Northern kingdom considered itself the perfect heiress of the national and religious traditions; and as important as the Southern kingdom, as far as the biblical history is concerned; but it had, from the beginning, to solve certain bristly problems:

Who would be the king?

Israel had for itself a king – a reputed military leader, living in exile, by the name of 'Jeroboam', who, having attempted to lead a coup against king Solomon, he failed, fled to Egypt (1 kings 11: 26-40), and stayed until the death of Solomon. He was promised by the prophet 'Ahijah' an enduring house, like that of David (1 kings 11: 38); on certain conditions to which he and his descendants were committed. He was actually followed by his son, whose reign came to an end by a conspiracy after just one year. Through about 200 years (between the years 886 and 747 B.C.), the Northern kingdom had 140 years of political stability, during which two dynasties reigned: of Omri and Jahu, separated by a horrible bloody coup. But there were three coups before 886, and four after 747. Anyway, kings of the north did not ever have the holy nature of those of the south, who came down from David, and who bore the hallow connected to the prophet Nathan's promise to David.

Nineteen kings reigned over Israel, the most prominent were Omri (886-875), Ahab (875- 853), and Jeroboam II (787-747).

The new kingdom generally kept the political and administrative structure, set by king Solomon; but it needed a capital. After several alternatives, Omri purchased a plateau right in the center of the kingdom, on the crossroads, on which he built a stronghold, he called 'Samaria', which quickly grew, to become an important center even after the collapse of the kingdom of Israel in the year 721.

The religious structure:

The political structure is set upon the religious one. Although the two kingdoms initially worshipped one and the same God, yet the Northern kingdom felt the need for a capital, a general temple, and a general altar for the people. Intending to compete with the temple of Jerusalem built by king Solomon, Jeroboam chose two famous temples: Dan in the north, and Bethel in the south; in each of which he set a golden calf (1 Kings 12: 26-33), and an altar, to express the worship of the hidden God; and in fear that the people, longing to go to the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, might eventually tend to rebel against the kings of Israel, and submit to the kings of Judah. According to some,

those golden statutes, symbolizing power and fertility, embodied the hidden animal-like god according to their fantasies; which was similar to several others in the Canaanite temples. The heathen worship drew the inhabitants who felt need for gods to take care of the crops and the fertility of their flocks of beasts; namely to provide them with security in their daily life.

While Israel's sin has been introducing the Canaanite images into the rites of worshipping the true God; a tendency to mix the worship of the true God with that of the false gods, making the true God on the same level of the heathen ones; namely toward spiritual adultery; that of Judah has been rather a disobedience to the divine commandment, and a disregard to the Word of God. The worship of the golden calf was the sign of the independence of the Northern kingdom from Judah and the dynasty of David. Jeroboam planted that worship in such a deep way that it could not be uprooted until the kingdom fell into the Assyrian captivity.

After fifty years, the situation developed into a more serious way, when Ahab king of Israel got married to Jezebel daughter of the heathen king of Tyre, and priest of Baal. The worship of Baal was introduced by Jezebel the wife of king Ahab, and followed by all the nineteen kings of the Northern kingdom, was uprooted by Elijah, Elisha, and Jahu.

In spite of that few of the kings of Judah ministered to the true God, and were great reformers, yet the Southern kingdom gradually deflected toward Baal-worship and other Canaanite religions, until the wound became dangerously incurable.

The economic and social situation:

That epoch was not the best for the common people in the kingdom, on account of that the political instability and the draught created a situation of great tribulation (1 Kings 17: 12; 2 Kings 6: 25-29). But until the ninth century B.C. the social gap was not critically apparent, as is shown when king Ahab could only, with great difficulty confiscate the vineyard of his commoner neighbor Naboth the Jezreelite (1 kings 21); And as when king Joram, during the siege of Samaria, was not in a condition better than the whole people (2 kings 6: 27).

With the advent of the eighth century, in the days of Jeroboam II, the situation quickly developed to more riches and prosperity, albeit for a limited section of the congregation, thanks to the international trade, that has been in the hands of the king and his court, who lived in luxury at the expense of the great majority, who had to borrow to survive, and when unable to pay back, they had to sell themselves as slaves. As to the judges who were appointed to give justice to the poor, they sold themselves to the rich, who, accordingly kept on their oppressive practices against the commoners.

The foreign politics:

After the death of king Solomon, the policy of extension started by king David, came to an end; and the surrounding nations gradually got back their independence. And instead of confronting only two mighty major countries – Egypt and Mesopotamia, there came to existence several tiny nations, at times united together, and at other times fighting one another. As it so happened when the Aramites of Damascus, for a certain time, joined forces with Israel against Judah (Isaiah 7); then fought against them several times; and put Samaria twice under siege (1 kings 20: 1; 2 kings 6: 24). King Ahab was killed while fighting them (1 kings 22: 34-35); and king Jehoahaz lost his whole army, after being destroyed by the king of Aram (2 kings 13: 7).

The greatest danger came from Mesopotamia, where Assyria came to be such a great empire, with greatly organized military might, and with a policy of killing and oppressing, that the surrounding peoples had to pay taxes to spare themselves a bigger calamity

According to the Assyrian historical documents, Israel attempted first to stand firm against them; and king Ahab, joining forces with other nations; sent 2000 chariots and 10,000 foot soldiers to battle, Yet to be disgracefully defeated, and had to pay taxes, as Jahu also did after him (in the year 841), then Joash (in the year 803), and Menahem (in the year 737).

There were periods of peace when the Assyrian loosened their hold a little bit, during which king Jeroboam II restored Damascus from them; But the Assyrian danger resumed when Tiglath Pileser III (747-727), who in the year 732, defeated an Aramite-Israeli coalition, and restored Damascus, and three Israeli provinces.

The Northern kingdom 933 – 721 B.C.

The first 50 years: struggling against Judah and Syria

The next 40 years: Prosperity under Omri.

The next 40 years: rolling down under Jehu and Jehoahaz,

The next 50 years: reached its greatest extent under Jerobam II.

The next 30 years: was disgracefully captivated.

The Southern kingdom 933 – 606 B.C.

The first 80 years: prosperity and growth in power.

The next 70 years: the calamity of entering into Baal-worship.

The next 50 years: reached its greatest extent under Oziah.

The next 15 years: Under Ahaz, paid taxes to Assyria.

The next 30 years: Under Hezekiah, restored its independence.

The next 10 years: mostly submitted to Assyria.

The relationship between the two kingdoms:

The first 80 years: in continuous wars.

The next 80 years: in peace.

The next 50 years in, on and off wars.

The united kingdom (Chapters 1 – 11)	The divided kingdom (Chapters 12 – 22)
The growth of Solomon's kingdom: Solomon's kingdom in us, is set on two foundations: 1- As a fulfillment of God's promise to our fathers,	1- The kingdom was divided because of Solomon's corruption as a result of his marriage to heathen foreign wives; and of the foolishness of his son

Solomon got what God promised his father David (2: 15; Chronicles 22: 9). 2- A request by Solomon of the heavenly wisdom (3) The greatness of the kingdom of Solomon The secret of the greatness of Solomon's kingdom in us lies in three things: a- Trust in God, Grantor of riches, peace, and glory (4) b- Setting an inner temple of God to dwell in us (5 – 9) c- Getting attached to the wisdom of God: The queen of Sheba desired to hear the wisdom of Solomon (10) Solomon's downfall: Getting united to evil (the heathen wives) would certainly lead to collapse (11)	Rehoboam who rejected the counsel of the elders (12), and listened to that of young men.. 2- The kingdom was divided into: a- The kingdom of Judah (Benjamin) under Rehoboam. b- The kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. 3- The kings of the two kingdoms were corrupted except for a few of the kings of Judah. 4- God did not leave Himself without a witness: He sent Elijah the fiery prophet who stood before Ahab the wicked king, and his heathen wife Jezebel. Elijah the zealous who stopped the rain (17) Elijah the courageous who prayed for a fire to consume the sacrifice (18). Elijah feeling sojourn. 5- The evil prevails for some time: God gave Ahab many chances to reconsider himself, but having gone so far to kill Naboth the Jezreelite, to inherit his vineyard, he and his wicked
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	wife collapsed (20 – 22).
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AN INSPIRATION FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF THE KINGS

SET ME A WISE AND GODLY KING O KING OF KINGS

- + You are the King of kings, O Son of David;
You desire to set me a wise and godly king;
To set the fallen tent of David inside me;
- + When Solomon sought wisdom, You granted him everything;
Let me acquire You, O divine Wisdom;
To have no place in me for foolishness, poverty, nor disgrace;
Let me unite with Your wisdom alone as the Groom of my soul;
Keep me from uniting with foreign heathens as Solomon did.
- + Grant me, together with Solomon, to set a holy house for You;
To have it dedicated by Your Holy Spirit;
For the dwelling of the heavenly God and His heavenly hosts
- + Grant me, together with Solomon, success in every work;
For You are the secret of my life, success, riches, and joy.
- + Drive out from me, the foolishness of Rehoboam, and the wickedness of Jeroboam;
To have no dissension dwell in me;
And no worship of the golden calves is set in me.
- + Do not allow me to follow the lead of Ahab and unite with the wicked Jezebel;
and have the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth crawl to me

+ Grant me the fiery heart of Elijah;
To slay every master who may occupy Your altar in me;
To bring forth in my depths a longing for repentance;
To make me enjoy You and the fire of Your Holy Spirit;
To become truly a king, a subject of Your pleasure, O King of kings.

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THE FIRST DIVISION

THE UNITED KINGDOM

(I Kings 1 – 11)

1- Solomon's kingdom established	1 - 2
2- Solomon's wisdom and riches	3 - 4.
3- Solomon's works and activities	5 - 9
4- Solomon's golden era	10.
5- Solomon's downfall and death	11

CHAPTERS 1 and 2

SOLOMON' S KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

In these two chapters, we see Solomon the son of David, born from Bathsheba, whom David had no right to marry; and who was not the firstborn who has the right to succeed his father on the throne. Yet he was chosen to be the king by his father according to a divine call; having been told: *"Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I will be his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever"* (1 Chronicles 22: 9, 10).

It so seemed that 'Adonijah' was expected to sit on the throne, being the fourth son of David (1 kings 2: 15, 22), after the death of the three older sons: Amnon, Absalom, (2 Samuel 3: 2-5), and Celab.

When David grew very old, 'Adonijah' planned to replace him; but the prophet Nathan intervened, spoiled his plan, and gave the kingdom to Solomon. Solomon was noble in dealing with his brother, Yet, with the later persistence on his plan, Solomon had to kill him.

CHAPTER 1

SOLOMON ENTHRONED A KING

A choice of a successor to king David needed a divine intervention, on account of that, up to that time, there was no well-established royal system. The royal system was new in Israel, not practiced except by two kings: Saul of the tribe of Benjamin, and David of the tribe of Judah. Saul was not succeeded by a son, a relative, nor by one of his tribe, but by David, the man appointed directly by God. Before that time there was the system of judges, all along a period of three centuries, which did not involve inheritance, but every one of them enjoyed authority through a direct call and a blessing from God (except for one). That call was an un-inheritable gift from God. ... King David promised his wife Bathsheba that her son Solomon would be the king after him; but Adonijah the son of Haggith planned to be the king.

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|----------------------------------|---------|
| 1- King David grows very old | 1 -- 4 |
| 2- Adonijah plans to become king | 5 -- 10 |

3- Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba	11 -- 14.
4- Bathshebah goes to David	15 -- 21
5- Nathan the prophet comes in to David	22 -- 31
6- Solomon enthroned a king	32 -- 48
7- Adonijah does homage to Solomon	49 – 53

1- KING DAVID GROWS VERY OLD:

While Saul, the first king over Israel died in battle in disgrace and reproach, and his royal dynasty came to an end; David, the righteous king, grew old, lost his physical vigor, yet died with an exultant soul, and a heart filled with peace, having set his son Solomon to consummate what he could not himself do.

“Now King David was old, advanced in years, and they put covers on him, but he could not get warm. Therefore his servants said to him, ‘let a young woman, a virgin be sought for our Lord the king, and let her stand before the king, and let her care for him, and let her lie in your bosom, that our Lord the King be warm. . So they sought for a lovely young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And the young woman was very lovely, and she cared for the king, and served him, but the king did not know her” (1 – 4)

Some may wonder why does the Holy Book mention such a story that may seem unimportant?

1- To show that, because king David has become so weak with old age, and not able to run the affairs of his kingdom, there was a need for anointing a successor to take over his royal responsibilities during his life

2- To tell after that how his son Adonijah planned to sit on the throne, in an indirect way, through his desire to marry Abishag the girl who lied in the king's bosom.

3- The tough life of David, and the troubles that dwelt upon him, gave him an early old age. He suffered long from the persecution of king Saul who dedicated his energies and those of his men to get rid of David. Then the limitless troubles he faced after being enthroned, those of his household in particular, like his son's Amnon raping his own sister, and the treason of his other son Absalom (2 Samuel 15 – 19). Although that condition described in (1-4) does not suit someone in the seventies of his age, yet God did not allow those unnatural early symptoms of old age to destroy David's spirit, but He exulted his heart until his last breath.

4- According to some, that early old age has dwelt upon David, as a divine chastisement because of his disgraceful rape of Bathsheba and having her husband Uriah the Hittite killed. For when man deprives himself of the warmth of the divine righteousness, no covers in the world could warm his heart up.. In Elihu's talk to 'Job' he said to him: "*Why are your garments hot?*" (Job 37: 17); And God, rebuking His people, too preoccupied with their own affairs, to care for God's house, said to them: "*You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm*" (Haggai 1: 6).

5- God probably intends to show us how David, with his fiery heart, and consistent positive work to the account of the kingdom of God, since his young days, had such an early old age, yet stayed exultant. ... It is befitting of us, who do not know what the future may bring forth upon us, to care for our life and fellowship with God, before old age or death dwell upon us..

6- Saying, “*But the king did not know her*” (4), is not to declare his inability to practice his marital relationship, nor that she was not one of his concubines, but to explain why Adonijah sought her a wife after his father’s death (2: 17).

David was 30 years old when he began his reign in Hebron (2 Samuel 5: 4); where he reigned 7 years and 6 months (2 Samuel 11; 1 Chronicles 3: 4); Then reigned 33 years in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5: 5). That means that just one year before he dies, he was 69 years old. Jews, at that time, did not live long; No king after David lived longer than 60 years, except for Solomon and Manasseh.

The word “servants” (2) was not meant in its literal sense; It came in the first and second book of the kings to mean one of four categories:

- * Slaves.
- * Those who are given land for the sake of their services as household servants.
- * Members of the royal court.
- * Royal personal counselors. Naaman the Syrian, the commander of the army, was said to be “*the king’s servant*” (2 Kings 5: 6); So were called Asaiah (22: 12), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who destroyed Jerusalem (1 Kings 25: 8),

Here, the term before us (2) applies to the third of these categories, namely members of the royal court, who take care of the king’s private quarters..

As to their care for seeking a young virgin to stand before the king and to lie in his bosom; that, according to Josephus the Jewish historian, has been followed as a medical treatment for the elders, also recommended by the Greek ‘Galen’, as a kind of a nurse, and not a wife.

“Abishag”, the name of that virgin, is a Hebrew name derived from ‘saga’, meaning (to err) or (to go astray), a probable hint to that she was so called

because her father might have deserted the household and went astray. While, according to others it was a name of a local unknown god, worshiped by the inhabitants of 'Shunam'.

The word 'Shulamite' as it came in the book of Songs (6: 13), a symbolic name of the church, the queen of peace, analogous to Solomon her groom (the king of Peace); on account of that it is the feminine name of Solomon in Hebrew.

Whereas, according to H.H. Rowley, it is an Arabic village by the name of 'Sulem', south-west of Mount 'Dahy', 7 miles south-east of Nazareth, mentioned in 2 Kings 4: 21, as home of the woman whom the prophet Elisha raised her son from death; about 3 ½ miles north of Jezreel, 5 miles north-west of Mount 'Galboh', and 16 miles of Mount Carmel. This village was surrounded by gardens, and had a spring of water. Some others still, believe it to be derived from the Hebrew word 'sakan', referring to someone (at the service) of others.

St. Jerome, in his letter to 'Nepotian', priest of Altinum, nephew of bishop 'Heliodorus', presents a symbolic interpretation of the episode of 'Abishag the Shunammite', from which we shall quote the following phrases:

- + When an elder feels cold, he would be covered with blankets, but he will only find his warmth in the bosom of a young girl. Bathsheba, Abigail, and the rest of David's wives and concubines, mentioned in the Holy Book, were still living; Yet none of them was chosen, on account of that they were old and cold, and the old man David was in need of a young girl to find his warmth in her bosom.

Although Abraham was older than David, yet he did not feel cold with his old wife Sarai; ... And Moses lived 120 years, and did not seek an alternative of Sephorah.

Who was that Shunammite then, the girl, who provided warmth; and who, at the same time, was holy, and did not stir up carnal lust in whom she gives warmth? ... Let us let Solomon, the wisest of men, tell us about his beloved father; ... Let us let the man of peace tell us about the bosom of David, the man of war! ... He wrote: *"Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you. Love her, and she will keep you. **Wisdom** is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom; and in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you. She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you"* (Proverb 4: 5-9).

All virtues practiced by man will change and corrupt with time, like fasting, watching, and almsgiving; when they become difficult to practice; So will be lying on the ground, moving from one place to another, giving hospitality to strangers, persistent praying, visiting the sick.. In short all works practiced by the body will deteriorate;; But wisdom alone will grow with time.

The name 'Abishag' itself, meaning (high above), may symbolically refer to the exalted wisdom of the elders, that flows over because of its multitude. It may also mean (roar) referring to the vague sound of waves of the sea, or to the divine thunder that endures in the ears of the elder.

The word 'Abishag' again could mean (purple); referring to that the love of wisdom grants warmth, and radiates splendor. If the color purple refers to the secret of the blood of Christ, it would emit a splendid radiation of wisdom.

(St. Jerome)

In other words, every believer needs to be taken into the bosom of the high wisdom that comes down from heaven, to take away from him the spiritual coolness, and to grant him a heart enflamed with the divine fire of love, enjoyed through the blood of Christ.

In the book of wisdom it came:

“Wisdom is better than strength; and a wise man is better than the mighty”

“Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her” (Wisdom 6: 12).

“The desire for wisdom leads for a kingdom” (Wisdom 6: 20)

“Give me the wisdom that sits by Your throne; and do not reject me from among Your servants” (Wisdom 9: 4)

St. Jerome makes it clear that the high wisdom grants warmth instead of coolness; the warmth of the fire sent by the Lord Christ on the earth (Luke 12: 49), sent to His two disciples on their way to Emmaus, who said: *“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”* (Luke 24: 32). This warmth has been also enjoyed by the xxxxxx.

Whoever gets attached to wisdom, the fiery Holy Spirit, Grantor of wisdom, would turn his life into spiritual warmth, that the world could not take away from his depths.

2- ADONIJAH PLANS TO BECOME KING: (5 – 10)

Adonijah was the fourth son of David (2 Samuel 3: 4; 1 Chronicles 3: 2). Yet, after the death of Absalom, Amnon, and Celab, Adonijah became the oldest living son of David at the time, and counted himself as the heir to the throne (2: 15). He intended to make sure of that before the death of his father, but God, the

unseen King, kept His right in choosing the earthly king (Deuteronomy 17: 15) who represents Him in Israel.

David never desired to be a king, and never hastened to be enthroned when the Lord chose him and the prophet Samuel anointed him, and did not count it a divine permission to fight against Saul to replace him. On the contrary, it was Saul who sought David's soul, and dedicated his energy to do it. When it so happened that Saul fell in David's hand more than once, he did not harm him; And when Saul was killed, David wept for him, and lamented him with a true loving heart. Now, David's own children fight over the throne, as Absalom did, he who not only sought the throne, but though his father's neck as well. And now Adonijah hastens to take the throne by force. He prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, not to fight for the sake of his country, but to confiscate the position by appearance; for which the Holy Book put the blame on his father who was not firm in raising him.

With the pride of heart, Adonijah did not desire the kingdom for serving the others, for the edification of his country, nor for the glory of God, but to realize the 'ego' in haughtiness, selfishness, and love of authority.

*"Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying: 'I will be king'; and he prepared for himself chariots
and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him" (5)*

+ Nothing can make the feet trip like pride. Love moves them to walk, progress and ascend; whereas pride makes them fall.

(St. Augustine)

Being born in Hebron when David was a king over Judah, Adonijah counted himself as the legal heir to the throne of his father David; supported by some

conservative persons like Joab the commander of the army of Israel, a relative of the king (1 Chronicles 2: 16), Abiathar the priest who was spared the massacre committed by king Saul against the priests of Nob; then accompanied David on his escape from the face of Saul in the wilderness of Judah (1 Samuel 22: 20).

Adonijah trusted in the popular strength, the way his brother Absalom did; and the two of them failed to fulfill the desire of their hearts; despite the fact that Adonijah was supported by both the military might (Joab, the commander of the army), and the religious authority (Abiathar the priest).

On account of the fact that Adonijah was no doubt aware of the oath uttered by his father before Bathsheba that her son Solomon would be his heir on the throne; as he planned to take the throne, he did not invite Solomon, nor the prophet Nathan, Benaiah, and the mighty men who heard the vow, and joined forces with David to set Solomon a king.

To make himself a king, Adonijah used human means; *“he prepared chariots, horsemen and fifty men to run before him”* (5). He did not respond to the praise uttered by the prophet Moses, saying: *“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider He has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and He has become my salvation”* (Exodus 15: 2).

“And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, ‘Why have you done so?’. He was also a very good-looking man. His mother had borne him after Absalom” (6)

One of the serious faults in which David, the great among the prophets, has fallen, was probably his slothfulness in raising his sons, and his disregard of their faults on which he never rebuked. In him, was realized the saying: “Whoever does not chasten his children, will, himself, be chastened by his children”. ...

David was gentle even toward Saul his persecutor; but, it was befitting of him to be firm in raising his sons.

“And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, ‘Why have you done so?’” (6). When his son ‘Amnon’ raped his own sister ‘Tamar’, David *“was very angry”* (2 Samuel 13: 21); yet he was not firm in punishing him; And when his son Absalom, who rebelled against him (2 Samuel 15), seeking, not only his throne, but his head as well, was killed in battle, David *“was deeply moved, and went up to his chamber and wept”* and was rebuked by Joab, the commander of the army (2 Samuel 18, 19).

The children are a precious gift, more precious than the whole world, given by God to the parents, not to possess, to conform according to their wish, to have dominion over them, or to boast in having them; But, as persons for whose sake the Lord died, they are, before anything else, to be raised as living members in the body of Christ; holy temples for the Holy Spirit; sons of, and heirs to God, together with Christ, and the image of God that glorifies Him.

In other words, parents should not count their child just as a precious gift, but as a living being who has their same value with God, and who partakes of their same portion. According to St. John Chrysostom:

[If some, for the sake of making statutes and drawing portraits of kings, get great honors, How much more would we, who adorn the image of the King of kings, by raising a true image of Him, will get?. For the true image is the virtue of the Spirit, when we raise our children to be good, meek, forgiving, giving, and compassionate; when we raise them to look at the world as nothing].

According to St. John Chrysostom, the parents do not present a statue to God, but a living image of Him in their son; they present him as a bearer of God's image in the fellowship of His features in the Lord Christ; and an icon of heaven, in his disregard of the worries and seductions of this world. The parents who bear

the image of God, enjoy the fellowship of the divine nature, and exult in the heavenly life in their depths, and in their homes, Present to God a holy generation in the Lord, not less in testifying to God than the past generation, but consummates its work.

The issue is not confined to receiving our children from the hand of God as a living talent, to consummate our mission, the way we did, of that of the past generations, so as meld the generations together as one body, to consummate the work of Christ the Head of us all; ... But we are committed to perceive that we are sought to present them to the Lord as an offering of love, by exhorting in them the spirit of strife, as good spiritual soldiers who joyfully carry the cross together with us.

Adonijah was like his brother Absalom, not only in the beauty of his appearance, but in binding the beauty of the body with the ugliness of the soul, that rebels even against parents.

“Then he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and they followed and helped Adonijah” (7)

He trusted in the human hand and plan, he drew to himself Joab the commander of the army, and Abiathar the priest, to guarantee both the military and the religious support, disregarding the divine will and the heavenly help, Yet they supported him, not with the conviction that he has the right to the throne, being the oldest son, but for the sake of their own benefits.

Joab, the firstborn of Zeruiah, sister of David, brother of Abishai and Asahel, a resident of Bethlehem, as the commander of the army of David, proved his military might and courage in battle, although he fell twice in unwarranted violence and bloodshed, having killed Abner (2 Samuel 3: 27) and Amasa (2 Samuel 20: 10) for no cause. Joab probably assumed that, by supporting

Adonijah in his rebellion, he would guarantee keeping his position as the commander of the army.

As for **Abiathar**, having been the only priest who escaped the brutality of king Saul in killing the priests for their alleged support of David (1 Samuel 22: 20-23), he became the spiritual counselor and intimate friend of David, the fugitive warrior. He was loyal to David, but supported the rebellious Adonijah, disregarding the will of God, and the promise of David to have Solomon as his successor on the throne. By having an important role in enthroning the new king, Abiathar probably hoped to guarantee his job as the high priest. Beside his jealousy of Zadok, who, although was the high priest in the Tabernacle of the meeting at Gibeon, yet he seemed to be the senior one, being referred to ahead of Abiathar (2 Samuel 15: 24; 20: 25; 15: 24 etc.). ... God let both Joab and Abiathar work together in that evil task, and delivered them to themselves, until their cups got filled, to be worthy of the divine chastisement.

According to some, the Hebrew word synonymous to the word “help” (7), also carries the meaning of being (terrified before him); namely, they helped Adonijah for being terrified of him.

“But Zadok the priest, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and the mighty men who belonged to David were not with Adonijah” (8)

While Adonijah moved with the pride of heart, trusting in his good looks, might, horsemen, human planning; and drawing the commander of the army and one of the priests to his side, God worked to set Solomon a king, as He had promised David. On the other side, were Zadok the priest, Benaiah, Nathan, Shimei, Tei, and the mighty men who belonged to David, who did not feel comfortable with the actions of Adonijah.

Zadok the priest, most probably mentioned concerning the tabernacle of the meeting in the days of Saul (1 Chronicles 16: 39); which refers to that he belonged to the tribe of Levi. Directly after the death of Saul, he accompanied king David in Hebron (1 Chronicles 12: 28); and during his escape from Jerusalem during the rebellion of Absalom, he spied for his sake (2 Samuel 15: 24-29; 17: 15). Once David's throne was established, he practiced the position of high priest, together with Abiathar (2 Samuel 9: 17; 15: 24; 29: 35) a situation, provoking jealousy between them, that made each of them take a controversial direction.

It is difficult to understand the significance of having two high priests at the same time. While Abiathar was probably the true high priest, responsible for the Sanctuary where the Ark of testimony was in Zion; Zadok was the high priest in the tabernacle of the meeting in Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16: 39).

Benaiah, appointed by the king over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites (2 Samuel 8: 18), was known for courage (1 Samuel 23: 20); and was seen by Joab as a competitor.

Nathan the prophet, accompanied king David (2 Samuel 7: 2). His mission was to reveal the divine will to the king, to keep him from doing according to his own human mind; but to perceive that he is nothing but a steward of the true King -- God Himself. When David sinned with Bathsheba, Nathan rebuked him, and when he proclaimed his repentance, he said to him: "*The Lord has also put away your sin, you shall not die*" (2 Samuel 12: 13). He had his own favor in the sight of the king, and enjoyed an intimate relationship with the royal household (2 Samuel 12: 25).

Shimei: a friend of the king, who included him among his great men (2 Samuel 12: 25).

Rei: A Hebrew name meaning (amiable). He is probably 'Ira the Jairite' mentioned in 2 Samuel 20: 26.

The mighty men: were those of authority working under king David; were most probably the 600 men who accompanied him during his early movements (1 Samuel 25: 13; 27: 3); and became the nucleus of his army.

“And Adonijah sacrificed sheep and oxen and fattened cattle by the stone of Zoheleth, which is by En Rogel.

He also invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah, the king's servants” (9)

Adonijah started his attempt to take the throne by offering a sacrifice, the way his brother Absalom did before him (2 Samuel 15: 7). Slaying animals and inviting the congregation to participate, has been practiced as a kind of a pact to work together by the spirit of faithfulness. By so doing, he intended to give his work a religious touch, pretending that he was called to receive the throne from God Himself, as testified by Abiathar the high priest who offered sacrifices to God. He practiced his evil under the name of God, using worship for the sake of his own benefit. He set his conspiracy outside Jerusalem by the stone of Zoheleth which is by En Rogel (6).

The stone of Zoheleth: meaning, the stone of a reptile, or of a worm, known as 'Valley of Rabab', south-west of Jerusalem; was probably a stone sanctified by the Canaanites, on account of being close to a spring of water, which they considered as the sources of life, and worshipped the god dwelling in it.

En Rogel, also known as 'fuller fountain', and 'fountain of the spy', on the boundary between the territories of Benjamin and Judah (Joshua 5: 7; 18: 16); probably refers to 'the serpent well' mentioned in Nehemiah 2: 13; thought to be

located at 'the well of Job', south of Jerusalem in the valley of Kedron; believed today to be replaced by a rock, as a result of an earthquake.

"But he did not invite Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the mighty men, or Solomon his brother" (10)

Inviting his brothers and all the men of Judah, except for his brother Solomon, Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, and Benaiah, reveals that Adonijah was aware of God's choice of Solomon a king, and of his inner perception of the position of Nathan the prophet as the man of God to realize the divine will. This is also confirmed by his refrain to counsel with his father concerning the issue of having the throne, to have his support in his endeavor; but his disregard of his father proves his perception that he was practicing some work against his father's will.

A great difference between the attitudes of David the king and of his son Adonijah, who did not inherit the spirit of his father, the meek, and the servant of many, who seeks the glory of God, and the edification of the people, not his own glory; ... he who never rode a chariot or a horse, but came walking to fight against Goliath in the name of the Lord of hosts; and he who did not get his throne by human conspiracy, but by seeking to fulfill the will of God.

Not inviting Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the mighty men, and Solomon his brother to partake of the banquet, refers to the fact that Adonijah did not mean peace, but intended to enter into violent struggle with them; which also reveal the existence of two adversary groups in Jerusalem, and a serious dissension in Israel.

Adonijah presents to us a sorrowful portrait of the soul that disregards God the true King, and His ministers working to His account; whether parents, priests, or guides. Adonijah did not care for the divine command to set Solomon a king, and

did not seek the counsel of his father, who, in his sight, was no more than a helpless old man; and counted his brother Solomon as a young lad not fit to be a king. According to his own human wisdom, talents, and possibilities, he considered himself the only one fit to reign ... Crawling into the heart, sin blinds it to recognize the truth, keeps it from receiving the divine will, and from seeking a wise and edifying counsel!

NATHAN THE PROPHET AND BATHSHEBA: (11-14)

Nathan was the spokesman in the name of God to king David, specially in the issues concerning his salvation and that of his people, like the divine promise to David of the continuation of his royal dynasty (2 Samuel 7); and exhorting him to repent after committing sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). Here, he intervenes to set Solomon a king. Although David, himself, was a prophet and a king, with experience with God, Yet, with the spirit of humility, he received the words of the Lord on the tongue of Nathan the prophet.

Nathan's intervention was out of feeling commitment to fulfill the will of God. Having proclaimed that Solomon will be the king, he intends to help David to fulfill his vow to Bathsheba. And in commiseration with Bathsheba, who had been put in a painful situation through rape and murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite; he intends to make it up for her; and to save her life and that of her son Solomon from the hand of Adonijah, who, if he gets his heart desire, would never spare their life, to guarantee staying a king (4: 2).

*“So Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying,
‘Have you not heard that Adonijah the son
of Haggith has become king, and David our Lord does not know
it?’” (11)*

We would expect of Nathan the prophet, who played a serious role in rebuking David on the sin he committed with Bathsheba, and on murdering her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11: 1-7), to take the side of the conservatives! ... What made him do otherwise?

- a- As a man of God, he knows the divine will to set Solomon the son of David a king on his throne.
- b- He probably believed that Bathsheba deserves to be compensated for her past affliction by honoring her son
- c- Being the instructor of the young man Solomon (2 Samuel 12: 25), he felt that he is fit to be the king more than Adonijah or any of his other brothers.

Bathsheba: daughter of Eliam (2 Samuel 11: 3), also called Ammiel (1 Chronicles 3: 5); Probably a granddaughter of Ahithophel, a very close counselor of David (2 Samuel 23: 34); and widow of Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11: 3), whom king David loved, committed adultery, and conspired to have her husband killed (2 Samuel 11). David married her and fathered Shimei, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon, from her..

“Come please, let me now give you counsel, that you may save your life and the life of your son Solomon” (12)

It is clear from the words of Nathan the prophet that he knows that Adonijah, being aware of his father's intention to give the kingdom to Solomon, had in his heart to kill Solomon and his mother, once he becomes king (12).

The Hebrew verb ‘malleti’ here means (security) (the island of ‘Malta’ was so called on account that it was a secure harbor for the Phoenician maritime fleet). So Nathan presents a counsel of security to Solomon and his mother, to save them from the evil hand of Adonijah.

“Go immediately to king David and say to him, ‘Did you not, My Lord, O King, swear to your maidservant, saying, ‘Assuredly, your son Solomon shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne’; Why then has Adonijah become king?’. Then while you are still talking there with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words” (13, 14)

Here we notice how Nathan the prophet talks very politely to Bathsheba; on account of that he knows that her son will become the king according to the promise of God.

3- BATHSHEBA GOES TO DAVID: (15-21)

“So Bathsheba went into the chamber to the king (Now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was serving the king)” (15)

Bathsheba went into the chamber of the king who, because of his old age and weakness, he could not come out. Bathsheba had a special place in the heart of king David, probably because of an inner feeling of guilt on his part, and a perpetual intention to make it up for her. ...

Her name, as well has the symbolic meaning of ‘the house of the Sabbath’; as though she represents the house where God and man find rest; for the ‘Sabbath’ means (rest) for God and man; God finds rest in the heart of the believer, who finds rest through his attachment, and the dedication of his heart to God.

“And Bathsheba bowed and did homage to the king. Then the king said : ‘What is your wish?’ Then she said to

*him. 'My Lord, you swore by the Lord, your God to your
maidservant, saying, 'Assuredly Solomon your son
shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne'. So now, look,
Adonijah has become king; and now, my
Lord the king, you do not know about it. He has sacrificed oxen
and fattened cattle and sheep in abundance,
and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and
Joab the commander of the army, but Solomon
your servant he has not invited. And as for you, my Lord, O king,
the eyes of all Israel are on you, that you
should tell them who will sit on the throne of my Lord the king after
him. Otherwise it will happen, when my Lord
the king rests with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be
counted as offenders" (16 – 21)*

4- NATHAN THE PROPHET COME IN TO THE KING: (22 – 25)

*"And just then, while she was talking with the king, Nathan the
prophet also came in. So they told the king, saying, 'Here is Nathan
the prophet'. And when he came in before the king, he bowed down
before the king with his face to the ground, and said, 'My Lord, O
king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit
on my throne? For he has gone down today, and has sacrificed
oxen and fattened cattle and sheep in abundance, and has invited
all the king's sons, and the commanders of the army, and Abiathar
the priest; and look! They are eating and drinking before him, and
they say, 'Long live king Adonijah!'" (22 – 25)*

By saying, "Long live the king", they do not mean the days of his life, or the enjoyment of the temporal life; but, looking at the king as the steward of God,

Grantor of the exalted life, they as though say: 'We wish the divine vitality, in particular, be in the king, and in his seed forever'.

But he has not invited me, even me your servant, nor Zadok the priest, nor Benaiah the son of Jehoida, nor your servant Solomon. Has this thing been done by my Lord the king, and you have not told your servant who should sit on the throne of my Lord the king after him?. The king answered and said, 'Call Bathsheba to me'. So she came into the king's presence and stood before the king" (26 -28)

As it was the custom with the kings, if he encounters his wife or one of his counselors, that no third party is allowed to be present except by a permission of the king, that is why, once Nathan came in to the king, Bathsheba left him.

"And the king took an oath and said, 'As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from every stress, just as I swore to you by the Lord God of Israel, saying, 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throe in my place', so I certainly will do this day'. Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the earth, and did homage to the king, and said, 'Let my Lord, king David live forever'" (29-31)

5- SOLOMON ENTHRONED A KING: (32 – 48):

"And the king said, 'Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada', so they came before the king. The king also said to them, 'Take with you the servants of your lord, and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and take him down to Gihon'" (32 – 33)

Kings used to be anointed with holy oil kept in the temple; by which the king would always feel that his whole life is dedicated to God through ministry to His people. Such an anointment seems to have its origin in an ancient tradition, taken by different peoples in different ways. ... We know how Jacob poured oil on a rock to dedicate the location at Bethel as a house for the Lord.... In Egypt, Pharaoh's authority was given to his deputies through an anointment; ... So it was with the kings of Syria during the fifteenth century B.C. It was a sign that the one anointed carried a special possibility through the anointment.

Anointment with oil has been followed in betrothal and marriage by the Egyptians and the Hittites; and by the Amorites in 'Mari' in their trade dealings and transactions in the eighteenth century. And was used in the rite of liberating the slaves.

It was used as well, in anointing the priest, who forsakes everything and dedicates his whole life to the ministry of God; in such a way that the anointment becomes equal to 'consecration' or 'sanctification' (Exodus 28: 41; 30: 30; 40: 13); Namely, in transferring man from the worldly to the divine work, concerning the Holy God. ... So it was in the anointment of the king: who forsakes everything worldly, to minister to the account of God among His people; Namely, being appointed by God for His ministry.

"Then you shall come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, and he shall be king in my place.

For I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah. And

Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the

king and said, 'Amen! May the Lord God of my lord say so too. As the Lord has been with my lord the king,

even so may He be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David. So

*Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of
Jehoiada, the Cherethites and the Pelethites
went down and had Solomon ride on king David's mule, and took
him to Gihon. Then Zadok the priest took
a horn of oil from the tabernacle and anointed Solomon. And they
blew the horn, and all the people said,
'Long live king Solomon'" (35 – 39)*

The tabernacle here is not the tabernacle of the meeting in Gibeon, where Zadok was the high priest, but the tabernacle set by David for the ark of the covenant on Mount Zion (2 Samuel 6: 17), where Abiathar was the high priest; while Zadok was the high priest. As there was no real enmity between the two high priests, Zadok could take the oil of anointment from the ark of the covenant in the absence of Abiathar to anoint Solomon.

*"And all the people went up after him; and the people played the
flutes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth
seemed to split with their sound" (40)*

This does not mean that all the people could play the flute, but that all of them rejoiced with great joy; the same way it happened when David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. (2 Samuel 6: 14).

Up to this very day, we find the people in the villages of Egypt express their joy by playing the flute or clapping the hands; which does not imply that all of them actually dance.

*"So Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they
finished eating. And when Joab heard the sound
of the horn, he said, 'Why is the city in such a noisy uproar?" (41)*

Joab's ears, being a man of war, were sensitive to the sound of the horn.

"While he was still speaking, there came Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest. And Adonijah said to him. 'Come in for you are a prominent man, and bring good tidings'." (42)

Adonijah so said to Jonathan the son of Abiathar, on account of that the later has previously proved his faithfulness to king David when he quickly moved at the time Absalom rebelled against him (2 Samuel 15 – 17). He was seen as a prominent man because of his social status to the king, and of his independent personality and mind.

"Then Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, 'No, our lord king David has made Solomon king. The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and they made him ride on the king's mule. So Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed him king at Gihon, and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard" (43-45)

Anointing Solomon a king, and letting him sit on his father's throne, while still living, has been inevitable, in order to avoid any source of confusion or doubt, after Adonijah's attempt to take the throne by force.

"And Solomon sat on the throne of the kingdom; and moreover the king's servants have gone to bless our lord king David, saying, 'May God make the name of Solomon better than your name, and may He make his throne

greater than your throne'. Then the king bowed himself on the bed"
(46-47)

They came to seek the blessing of God, proclaimed in David, to dwell upon his son Solomon.

"Also the king said thus, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who has given one to sit on my throne this day, while my eyes see it" (47)

With his old age, with his feeling that his day is ultimately approaching, and with forsaking his throne to his son Solomon while still living, David's mind was only preoccupied with praising and giving thanks to the Lord, who has fulfilled His divine promise to set his seed a king over Israel (2 Samuel 23: 5; Psalm 89: 3; 123: 11 etc; Isaiah 55: 3).

St. Augustine often say, [Sing, and consummate your journey; ... Sing and walk along; ... Sing, and strive as a warrior].

- + Let us now, brethren, rejoice, not in our rest but in our labor; the way the travelers sing and praise while on their journey.... If you progress in goodness, in the true faith, in the upright life, ... Sing, and consummate your journey!

(St. Augustine)

6- ADONIJAH DOES HOMAGE TO SOLOMON: (49-53)

"Then all the guests who were with Adonijah were afraid, and arose, and each one went his way. Now Adonijah

was afraid of Solomon, so he arose, and went, and took hold of the horns of the altar” (49-50)

The altar, for all nations, has been a place of refuge for the criminals worthy of death; But in Israel, according to the law, it provides protection to those who kills someone without intention (Exodus 21: 14); and the cities of refuge bore the same idea (Numbers 35). It is not clear whether Adonijah resorted to the altar in the tabernacle of the meeting in Zion, or in that in Gibeon, or in the one built by David in 'Araunah (2 Samuel 24: 18-25). But most probably it was the first one; for it is not mentioned that he went as far as to Gibeon; and the third altar was without horns.

The place of worship was looked upon as one for the fulfillment of justice. Hence, holding the horns of the altar, (or resorting to one of the cities of refuge) (Numbers 35) does not imply, not putting someone on trial, but not condemning him to death before giving him a just one, in which he would defend himself, and try to prove his innocence.

What Adonijah has done by holding the horns of the altar, reveals his great fear of Solomon, and is a reaction of the intention that actually lies in his depths to do to Solomon and his mother, in case his plan happens to succeeded and he took the throne.

“And it was told Solomon, saying, ‘Indeed is Adonjah afraid of king Solomon; for look, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, let king Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword’. Then Solomon said, ‘If he proves himself is a worthy man. Not one hair of him will fall to the earth; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die’” (51 – 52)

Not intending to start his reign with a verdict of death, Solomon granted the traitor a conditional amnesty.

“So king Solomon sent them to bring him down from the altar. And he came and fell down before king Solomon, and Solomon said to him, ‘Go to your house’” (53).

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 1

**LET ME INHERIT MY FATHER DAVID TOGETHER WITH
SOLOMON**

AND LET THE PLAN OF ADONIJAH IN ME FAIL

- + Why should I see the elder David in the bosom of the beautiful Abishag?
Grant me, O Lord, Your wisdom, to take me in her bosom, to provide me with spiritual warmth;
Grant it to me as a girl who never gets old, to accompany me until the end..
- + Behold, Adonijah assumes that he has the right to reign;
He opposes me by his human wisdom, military might, and human support;
He deceives many, to take by force my right to inherit David, my father;
He intends to deny me the throne, and plots to have me even killed.
- + Work in the hearts of Your men, as You did in the heart of Nathan;
Grant me grace, to scatter the plot of my adversaries;
Destroy the enforcer, and fulfill Your promise to me;
To inherit, together with Solomon the throne of my father David;

By You I become a king, O King of kings;
By You, I enjoy the throne, the throne of love, of giving, and of ministry.

+ Let David's heart rejoice in paradise;
Let him say what he said when Solomon sat on the throne:
*"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has given one to sit on my throne
this day, while my eyes see it" (48;*
Glory be to You, O who set me up from trash;
To sit together with the elites of Your people.

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CHAPTER 2

DAVID'S INSTRUCTIONS TO HIS SON SOLOMON

The last moments in David's life revealed what he bore in his heart; having been only preoccupied with fulfilling God's will concerning setting Solomon a king; and realizing the divine justice concerning those who did wrong to the law, and those who gave work of love.

It is the custom of parents, when they feel the closeness of their departure from this world, to give farewell instructions, with blessings, to their children, particularly to the firstborn. The Lord Christ, Himself, just before His crucifixion, gave us His magnificent farewell talk, as well as a farewell prayer.

David's ordainments to establish the throne of his son Solomon, as they came in 1 Chronicles 28, 29, are summarized as follows:

- 1- He introduced his son to men of the royal court, as his successor, chosen by God.
- 2- He charged them to obey the divine commandments.
- 3- He exhorted Solomon and the people to build the temple, and provided them with a model of the building, together with the material he dedicated to realize that goal.
- 4- He exhorted the elite of the people to partake of that work.
- 5- He raised praise and thanksgiving to God, and set a religious celebration.
- 6- He anointed Solomon in the presence of the Lord before the people (1 Chronicles 29: 22) for the second time; as it happened with Saul (1 Samuel 11), and David (2 Samuel 2: 4; 5: 3); to make sure that no rebellion would ever happen against Solomon after his death.

The farewell instructions reveal the longing of David the prophet, that his successors would fear the Lord, and be faithful to the covenant, so that the divine promise for the continuation of David's royal dynasty would be realized. For that would be the only guarantee for their success in every work they do.

1- Spiritual instructions	1 - 4
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1- SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTIONS: (1 – 4)

With great reverence and seriousness, king David, while on his deathbed, provided his instructions to his son Solomon; which came as an example for what parents should provide their children.

a- Looking at death as a setting forth of the soul along a collective procession, together with the souls of his fathers toward their ultimate home:

"Then the days of David drew near that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying: 'I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man'" (1, 2)

Not fearing to hear or to talk about death, David expressed it in a magnificent way; counting it as the way of all the earth;... that humanity which came out of the earth, is committed to return to it; ... That death is a setting forth from the valley of tears (Psalm 23: 4), as though in a procession that gathers all, even prophets, elites, righteous believers, and kings; yet with the spirit of hope, crossing over to beyond time.

- + To those who truly understand it, death is eternity; Whereas to the foolish who do not, it entails an ultimate obliteration. We should not fear death, but fear the perdition of the soul, namely, not knowing God. That is truly what the soul should fear.
- + Being aware that it is impossible to escape from death, and that it implies the liberation from the ailments to which man submits in this life, the men of reason practice virtues, love God, and confront death without sighs, fear, nor tears.

(St. Anthony the Great)

b- An exhortation to the new generation to work with the spirit of strength, commitment, and feeling of responsibility:

“Be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man” (2).

Such a fatherly charge bears a reflection of the divine commandment to every leader, even to every believer; For God wishes all His children to be leaders, trust in the divine presence, and in the enjoyment of the divine promises and the heavenly strength. However old we may be, we feel like children; but by the Lord, we become mature, carrying the spirit of strength.

“Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the one who goes with you; He will not leave you, nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31: 6).

“Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them” (Joshua 1: 6).

*“Only be strong and courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand, nor to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go” *Joshua 1: 7).*

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1: 9).

“Wait on the Lord, be of good courage; and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord” (Psalm 27: 14).

“Be of good courage; and He shall strengthen your heart; all you hope in the Lord” (Psalm 31: 24).

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16: 13).

Endure like a man the fire that purifies your desires; and with courage, that which purifies your heart. Do not assume that what you still do not have, you will not have; ; And do not fall into despair, as long as you meditate in the words: *“Wait on the Lord”*.

c- A commitment to faithfulness to the divine covenant, and to keeping His statutes:

“And keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do, and wherever you turn; that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, He said, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel” (3, 4)

What is walking in the way of the Lord, but the enjoyment of the divine presence, leaning upon the divine arm, and keeping the divine commandment, instead of walking according to the human mind, and trusting in the military power, gold, silver, and outer appearances. If the believer wishes to be a true king, of

authority over his thoughts, feelings, words, and behavior; and to be able to trample over the hosts of darkness, he is committed to keep the statutes, commandments, judgments, and testimonies of the Lord. For by keeping them, they would keep him, and would grant him of their features, sanctification, wisdom, together with strength and joy.

In our interpretation of the psalms, we gave a discernment between the statutes, commandments, judgments, and testimonies.

Presenting to us His holy statutes, God wishes us to walk with the spirit of prudence and discipline, in order to bear in us His holy life; and that no confusion would find a place in us. By His commandments He wishes us to bear the spirit of obedience, to share with our Christ, obedient to the Father, His exalted features. By keeping His judgments, we would proclaim our trust in His compassionate and wise fatherhood; and our acceptance of His divine will, even in the moments of bitter chastisement. By holding fast to His testimonies, we testify before ourselves, as well as before our brethren, our surety of the divine truth, and our anticipation of what He has promised us of the eternal life.

The prophet David, calls his son Solomon to commit himself to the following:

If, as a king, he seeks the submission of all his subjects to the system he establishes for the sake of the peace of the country, he would be committed, on his part, to submit to the divine ordinance; and not to walk according to his personal desires. For, inside him, he has the kingdom of God that covers the whole heavens.

By being committed to obey God and His statutes; his people would obey and accept his laws.

By being committed to accept God's just judgments; he would bear the spirit of justice in his own judgments that concern the nation.

By being committed to testify to God, who is faithful in His promises; he, himself, would become the place of trust by his people.

By that, the prophet David presents to us a living practical concept of success; that, what we practice in our relationship with God, our Father, will come back on us, even in our relationship with our brethren. And as it is written: “*As you have done, it shall be done to you*” (Obadiah 15). If we come to be the object of God’s pleasure, we get grace even before our enemies.

As to the divine promise to David that he shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel; the Lord gave it to him in 2 Samuel 7: 11-16; and confirmed it to his son Solomon in 1 Kings 8: 5. Yet that promise came with a condition, which, unfortunately, was not fulfilled by the sons of David; and hence the kingdom was taken away from them through the Assyrian, then the Babylonian captivity.

But the divine promise that the Messiah will come from his seeds, was not conditioned. Our Lord Jesus Christ came as the Son of David; and by His coming, the first promise was confirmed by a new spiritual concept, as talked about by the prophet Jeremiah (33: 14-18); As the Messiah came “*The Lord our righteousness*”, who granted us Himself righteousness before God the Father; and we came to be spiritual kings, sitting on the throne of the house of Israel, counted as sons of David the king, or rather of the Son of David, the King of kings.

He probably refers here to the statutes concerning the king, as presented by the prophet Moses, saying:

“But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again’ . Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. Also it shall be, when he

sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes; that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel” (Deuteronomy 17: 16-20).

The king was not forbidden of riding a horse; even though the King of kings, in His humility entered into Jerusalem *“sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey”* (Matthew 21: 5). But he was forbidden of using horses as a kind of vain glory; Or that, with the multitude of horses, some people would be honored beyond their own worthiness; as it is written: *“I have seen servants on horses, while princes walk on the ground like servants”* (Ecclesiastes 10: 7).

According to the scholar Origen, the horses, here, refer to the demons who fell from heaven because of their pride, those who followed him,, who said, *“I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High”* (Isaiah 14: 14).

+ It was written: *“A horse is a vain hope for safety”* (Psalm 33: 17); and, *“The horse and its rider, He has thrown into the sea”* (Exodus 15: 1); And the king of Israel was commanded not to ride a horse (See Deuteronomy 17: 16).

I think that the horses are the sinners, and their riders are the demons; ... he who turned into a persecutor is a horse running wildly, ridden by a stirred up demon who pierces us with a spear.

(St. Jerome)

- + We can also take the horse as a symbol of any processions in this world, or any kind of honor, on which man trusts in pride.... If you count that the higher you rise, the more exalted and secure you get; Don not you know that the higher you go, the harder and heavier will be your fall?!... Security and safety are not realized through power, authority, honor, glory, nor by the horse!

(St, Augustine)

2- AN INSTRUCTION CONCERNING JOAB: (5 – 6)

“Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two commanders of the army of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed. And he shed the blood of war in peace-time, and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet. Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace” (5-6)

Walking with the spirit of justice:

Joab was worthy of death because he killed two great commanders of the army: Abner (2 Samuel 3: 27), and Amasa (2 Samuel 20: 10). Through envy and deception, for which David did not only grieve, but he was himself accused of killing Abner (2 Samuel 3: 28, 37). He shed blood of war in peace-time; for they were not his enemies fighting him.

Saying, *“He put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet”*, reveal the spirit of guile and deception. In battle

the warriors confront one another for the sake of their countries, and their blood is shed on their own body and garment. But Joab, pretending to take Abner and Amasa to his bosom in friendship, he stabbed them in the stomach, and their blood flowed on his belt and sandals; as though their innocent blood attached to his body.

According to David, killing those two great commanders was a serious loss for him personally; as though Joab did it to him; And it is not befitting of him as a responsible king of a nation that entered into a covenant with God, to let such crimes go without punishment, which he postponed until the proper time, after the end of wars in his days; to avoid any probability of disturbance in the army, where some may most probably have admiration for Joab.; to realize justice in the days of his son Solomon, whom he counseled to do it according to his wisdom.

AN INSTRUCTION CONCERNING THE SONS OF BARZILLAI THE GILEADITE: (7)

*“And show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table,
for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother” (7)*

It is to be noticed that Barzillai the Gileadite, alone, was mentioned in 1 Samuel 17: 27, who showed compassion toward David when he fled from his son Absalom, and gave him food. Yet having been 80 years old at the time, his sons must have helped him do it. Most probably Barzillai was already dead, for David did not refer to him but to his sons. By the same spirit, Paul the apostle prayed to the Lord *“To grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain”* (2 Timothy 1: 16-18).

3- AN INSTRUCTION CONCERNING SHIMEI THE SON OF GERA: (8 – 9)

“And see, you have with you Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a malicious curse on the day when I went to Mahaneim. But he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the Lord, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword’. Now, therefore, do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man and know what you ought to do to him; but bring his gray hair down to the grave with blood” (8, 9)

Shimei the Benjamite showed a kind of hatred toward David (2 Samuel 16: 5-8), having cursed him with a malicious curse. And when David returned to Jerusalem, he fell at his feet seeking forgiveness, and the king so promised him not to put him to death by the sword; on account of that at the time, David did not want to mix the joy of his people for his return with practicing any punishment (2 Samuel 19: 19-24). He forgave him on what concerned him as a person; but having so erred concerning the Lord’s anointed, and the king as a representative of God, he had no right to forgive; Hence his counsel to his son came as: *“Do not hold him guiltless”*, meaning, do not punish him according to a personal wish of avenging me, your father; but judge him as a just judge. ... With his compassionate heart toward his adversaries, David refrained from doing Shemei any harm all the days of his life; Yet, he confirmed to his son, the new king, the seriousness of slothfulness, in holding the criminal guiltless; hence he sought from him to practice the divine judgment,

By saying, *“Do not hold him guiltless”*, he meant, do not exonerate him, on account of that I swore to him not to put him to death by the sword, But, being a wise man, you know what you ought to do to him, for he probably represents danger on the kingdom; Being deceptive, he may, use your young age, to plot against you.

4- SOLOMON'S KINGDOM FIRMLY ESTABLISHED: (10-12)

"So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (10)

It was not allowed for the commoners to set burial places within the walls of the cities; yet Jerusalem was exempted for the sake of the royal household. David was buried in the city of David on Mount Zion; and his grave was there until the days of the Lord Christ (Acts 2: 29).

According to the Historian Josephus, Solomon put many treasures together with his father's body in his grave; which were preserved for 13 centuries until 'Hyracanus' the high priest opened it up, took away from it 3000 talents of gold, and gave them to Antiochus to lift the siege up from Jerusalem. And according to him, as well, Herod the great took from the grave a multitude of treasures. St. Jerome spoke of David's grave as though still existed even in his days.

"The period that David reigned over Israel was 40 years: Seven years he reigned in Hebron, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years. Then Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his kingdom was firmly established" (11, 12)

David's life has been a continuous series of sufferings, particularly during the 40 years he reigned, during which he strove to establish the kingdom, not for the sake of his personal glory, but for the glory of God. Yet his sufferings were unceasingly mixed with joy and praise to God. Now his son receives the scepter of a kingdom, firmly established to a great extent, a fruit of the strife of his father David.

5- ADONIJAH "SPOKE AGAINST HIS OWN LIFE": (13 -25)

"Now, Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, and she said, 'Do you come peaceably?', and he said, 'peaceably'" (13)

The question of Bathsheba whether Adonijah came peaceably, reveals her inner doubts of his evil intentions.

"Moreover he said, I have something to say to you; and she said, 'Say it'. Then he said, 'You know that the kingdom was mine, and all Israel has set their expectations on me, that I should reign. However the kingdom has been turned over, and has become my brother's, for it was his from the Lord" (14)

In his talk to Bathsheba, Adonijah revealed that, being the oldest of David's living sons, he had the right for the kingdom, a fact anticipated by all the people, including Abiathar the high priest; but *"it was his (Solomon's) from the Lord"* (15). He said to the king's mother, what he already spread among the people and the elites; yet he must have omitted the part, saying that it is the Lord who has chosen Solomon.

"Now I ask one petition of you, do not deny me, and she said to him, 'Say it'. Then he said, 'Please speak to king Solomon, for he will not refuse you, that he may give me Abishag the Shunammite as wife'. So Bathsheba said, 'Very well, I will speak for you to the king'.. Bathsheba, therefore, went to king Solomon, to speak to him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed down to her, and sat down on his throne, and had a throne set for the king's mother; so she sat at his right hand" (14-19)

With the spirit of humility, on the entrance of his mother, Solomon rose up to meet her, and did not wait for her to reach him; bowed down to her, and let her sit at his right hand, as a sign of honoring her, according to what came in psalm 110: 1, and according to the custom of the Arabs, the Greeks, and the Roman kings.

By doing that, Solomon consummated the fifth divine commandment received by the prophet Moses, concerning honoring the parents. And as his father had passed away, his mother represented the two parents together. Yet, despite honoring her in such a great way, Solomon took a firm position toward his brother and his helpers who were still planning to give him the kingdom.

“Then she said, ‘I desire one small petition of you; do not refuse me’; And the king said to her, ‘Ask it, my mother, for I will not refuse you’. So she said, ‘Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah your brother as a wife’”
((20, 21)

Although Abishag was just a kind of nurse, yet, in the sight of the people, she was one of the king’s concubines; and, according to the Israelites, as well as the Persians, whoever acquire the deceased king’s women, would be worthy of inheriting his throne (2 Samuel 12: 8).

Bathsheba’s request does not mean that she was not aware of that tradition; but probably because of Adonijah’s smooth talk; or on account of that she knew that abishag was only a nurse, and not a concubine. Although Adonijah’s lips were as smooth as oil, but his heart was ready for an inner bitter war; yet Bathsheba assumed that by responding to Adonijah’s request, she would probably appease his anger toward his younger brother, and he would forsake his violent intentions.

“And king Solomon answered and said to his mother, ‘Now why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah;

Ask for him the kingdom also – for he is my older brother – for him and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son

of Zeruiah. Then king Solomon swore by the Lord, saying, ‘May God do so to me, and more also; if Adonijah has

not spoken this word against his own life! Now, therefore, as the Lord lives, who has established me and set me on

the throne of David my father, and who has made me a house, as He promised, Adonijah shall be put to death

today!’. So king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and he struck him down, and he died”

(22-25)

Solomon referred to Abiathar the priest, and to Joab, on account of his belief that they were provoking Adonijah to take the throne, to reign through him.

I do not think that Solomon broke his promise to respond to his mother’s request; As his care for the safety of the kingdom, in his sight, was more important than fulfilling his wrong promise to his mother. In the same way, according to some, it would not have been considered a break of promise, if Herod did not kill John the Baptist, to give his head to Hirodea; For a retreat to the right is far better than keeping a promise with destructive to himself or to others.

6- ABIATHAR REMOVED FROM PRIESTHOOD: (26 – 27)

It so seems that Solomon knew for sure that Abiathar the priest and Joab were behind Adonijah’s request to have Abishag as a wife; and that they were still plotting a new movement of rebellion by Adonijah (22). Having been occupying prominent positions, and representing role models to the leaders and the people, Solomon was aware that what they were doing was a serious hidden treason.

“And to Abiathar the priest the king said, ‘Go to Anathoth to your own fields, for you are worthy of death, but I will not put you to death at this time, because you carried the ark of the Lord God before my father David, and because you were afflicted every time my father was afflicted. So Solomon removed Abiathar from being priest to the Lord, that he might fulfill the word of the Lord which He spoke concerning the house of Eli at Shiloh” (26-27)

Solomon's wise attitude toward Abiathar the priest reveals that he was free of any personal wish for revenge, nor of practicing violence. Although partaking of Adonijah's conspiracy to take the throne was worthy of death, yet he only sent him to Anathoth where his fields were; for the sake of his honor as a high priest, of carrying the ark of God, and because he was afflicted together with his father David during his persecution by king Saul (1 Samuel 22: 20; 23: 8), and the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 15: 24 etc.).

What he did was a fulfillment of the word of the Lord which He spoke concerning the house of Eli (1 Samuel 2: 30-33). And by that the high priesthood moved from the house of Eli to Zadok of the house of Elizar; according to the early way.

7- JOAB KILLED: (28 – 35)

“Then news came to Joab, for Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom. So Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, and took hold of the horns of the altar. And king Solomon was told, ‘Joab has fled to the tabernacle of the Lord; there he is by the altar’. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoidah,

saying, 'Go, strike him down'. So Benaiah went to the tabernacle of the Lord, and said to him, 'Thus says the king, 'Come out'. And he said, 'No, but I will die here'. And Benaiah brought back word to the king, saying, 'Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me'. And the king said to him, 'Do as he has said, strike him down, and bury him, that you may take away from me and from the house of my father the innocent blood which Joab shed. So the Lord will return his blood on his head, because he struck down two men, more righteous and better than he, and killed them with the sword – Abner the son of Ner, the commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, the commander of the army of Judah – though my father David did not know it. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his descendants forever. But upon David and his descendants, upon his house and his throne, there shall be peace forever from the Lord'. So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and struck and killed him, and he was buried in his house in the wilderness. The king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his place over the army; and the king put Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar" (28-35)

Why did Joab flee to the tabernacle of the Lord, (not to the tabernacle of the meeting, but to the holy tabernacle at Zion), to take refuge in the altar?

- + Probably because he knew that Solomon was aware of that he and Abiathar the priest were behind Adonijah's request for Abishag to become his wife.

- + He probably heard from the state's men around the king, of David's charge to his son Solomon, concerning his person, and perceived that the time has come to put the verdict into effect.
- + He perceived the seriousness of his position after Adonijah was killed and Abiathar was removed to his fields.
- + By taking refuge in the tabernacle of the Lord, He probably intended to put Solomon in a tight corner; as in case he insist on killing him, he would be defiling the altar with his blood.
- + Probably feeling guilty, and perceiving that he is worthy of death; he took refuge in the tabernacle to die in the house of the Lord, as though seeking mercy under the wings of God.

Although the Holy Book did not mention that Joab was the one who counseled Adonijah to seek Abishag as his wife, yet Solomon issued his verdict for the sake of his killing Abner and Amasa.

Assuming that his two horrible crimes were forgotten with time; and that Solomon stir-up was for the sake of his request for Abishag as his wife, Joab sought refuge in the altar to prove that he did not provoke Adonijah to do so. But the fact is that the altar according to what came in Exodus 21: 13, 14, does not protect a killer who acts with premeditation and guile.

By killing Joab, Solomon took away from his father and his house the innocent blood shed, and the defilement from the land, according to what is written: *"So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it"* (Numbers 35: 33); And, *"But if a man acts with premeditation against his*

neighbor, to kill him with guile, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die”
(Exodus 21: 14).

Not wishing to bear the responsibility of killing someone in the holy place,
Benaiah went back to the king who gave him the command to apply
the law, saying: *“Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of
innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you”*
(Deuteronomy 19: 13). David’s house would not be well established unless his
descendants practice the righteousness and justice according
to the Lord’s command.

However, Solomon commanded Benaiah to kill Joab, and to bury him; so that his
corpse would not be left in disgrace and reproach; on account
of that he has fought together with his father. He was buried in his house east of
Bethlehem in the wilderness of Judah. Burying one in his land
or house bears some kind of honor, as it happened in the case of Samuel the
prophet (1 Samuel 25: 1), and others.

Solomon, therefore, gave the command to kill, not to avenge himself, but in
obedience to the charge of his father; and fulfilling the saying: *“Take
away the wicked from before the king, and his throne will be established in
righteousness”* (Proverb 25: 5).

8- SHIMEI PUNISHED: (36 – 46)

*“Then the king sent and called for Shimei and said to him, ‘Build
yourself a house in Jerusalem and dwell there,
and do not go out from there anywhere; for it shall be, on the day
you go out and cross the Brook Kidron, know
for certain you shall surely die, your blood shall be on your own
head.’ And Shimei said to the king, The saying*

is good. As my Lord the king has said, so your servant will do” (26-38)

Shimei was probably called from his town ‘Bahurim’, where his house was (2 Samuel 16: 5), and was ordered to build himself a house in Jerusalem, dwell in it, and on no circumstances, to go anywhere, lest he would be put to death; to which he swore by the Lord to obey. When he was called from his town, and knowing what happened to Adonijah, Joab, and Abiathar, and what king David charged his son Solomon to do, he must have thought that he was called to be put to death; But Solomon knew how to discern between the different crimes; his verdict upon Joab, the killer was different from his verdict upon Shimei.

He called him and put him under confinement, not in a house but in a city; and not in any city, but in Jerusalem, the beautiful, the royal, and holy city, the source of joy of the whole world at that time. It is as though he was confined in an earthly paradise. Solomon’s intention was to keep Shimei away from dwelling among his tribe, lest he might plot something new against the king. Knowing how dangerous he is, he gave him some freedom, yet he put him under his sight, a just verdict to test the extent of Shimei’s obedience and his faithfulness to his promise.

“Now it happened at the end of three years, that two slaves of Shimei ran away to Achish the son of Maachah, king of Gath; and they told Shimei, saying, ‘Look, your slaves are in Gath’. So Shimei arose, saddled his donkey and went to Achish at Gath to seek his slaves. And Shimei went and brought his slaves from Gath. And Solomon was told that Shimei has gone from Jerusalem to Gath and had come back. Then the king sent and called for Shimei, and said to him, ‘Did I not make you swear by the Lord, and warn you, saying, ‘Know for certain that on the day you

go out and travel anywhere, you shall surely die?’, and you said to me, ‘The word I have heard is good’. Why then, have you not kept the oath of the Lord and the commandment that I gave you?’. The king said moreover to Shimei, ‘You know as your heart acknowledges all the wickedness that you did to my father David. Therefore the Lord will return your wickedness on your own head. But king Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the Lord forever’. So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada , and he went out and struck him down, and he died. Thus the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon” (39-46)

Having left the city to fetch his runaway slaves to Gath, Shimei was counted a breaker of the vow by the Lord, and was sentenced by Solomon to be put to death.

Although some scholars consider Solomon’s verdict as too harsh; But, according to others, although Shimei had the right to have his slaves back, yet, having sworn by the Lord to obey, he should have informed Solomon of the situation, and waited for his instructions. He had no right to break the vow by the Lord, whatever the situation was.

Now, Solomon’s kingdom was finally established after three years (39).

Saying, “*Shimei saddled his donkey*”, and not let one of his servant saddle it for him, reveals that he went out by night without telling anyone, even his own household, He brought his slaves back, but he lost his life and everything he possessed, on account of breaking his vow by the Lord. That is how many do when they break the divine commandment for the sake of temporal goods

(considered as slaves to serve them), to lose their eternal life, and to have their souls perish.

The reasons for Solomon's verdict, uttered on Shemei, was that he knew the wickedness in Shemei's heart since the days of his father David, when he reviled the Lord's anointed, and cast stones at him. His curse on the Lord's anointed, came back on him; But David and his descendants will have the blessing, and David's throne will be established before the Lord and not before men.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 Kings 2

LET YOUR KINGDOM BE ESTABLISHED IN MY DEPTHS

- + David presented his farewell charge to his son Solomon;
And behold, You, the Son of David grants me Your farewell charge;
Not to restrict my freedom, but to establish your kingdom in my depths;
And to set me a king to unite with You, O King of kings;

- + Having been about to go the way of all the earth,
David supported his son, saying, *"Be strong, and prove yourself a man"*
I see You, O Son of David, walking on a unique road;
I see You, for my sake, passing through the winepress alone;
I hear You crying out to me, 'Be strong, and be to me a son and a companion';
Who will grant me the strength and maturity, but Your Holy Spirit?
Grant me Your Spirit, who raises from the dead;
To bring forth in me the spirit of strength, conquest, and life.

- + By You, I become strong, and keep Your commandment;

By You, all the hosts of evil are destroyed;
Let the charge of my father David sound high in my ears;
"Be strong, and prove yourself a man";
"Keep the Lord's statutes, to succeed in everything you do".

+ Your Spirit leads me on the way of Your commandment;
Keeping Your statutes, I will live by the rite of heaven;
Bowing before Your judgments, I will perceive the secrets of Your plans;
And I will rejoice in Your testimonies, testifying to Your exalted work with
me.

+ Let Joab the blood-shedder, be killed;
To keep defilement away from the land of my heart;
Let every violence in my depths be taken away;
So as not to bear the features of guile of the devil;
But bear Your features of true love;
Let any thought of guile in me be killed, the way Solomon killed Joab;
He who shed innocent blood;
I wish no guile finds a place in my depths;
Nor take over the steering wheel of my will

+ Let me pay back the sons of Barzillai the good deed they did to me;
So as not to be in debt to anyone;
Except by love and consistent compassion;
Instruct me not to abuse the love of my brethren;
Nor to seek their services with selfishness;
But to desire to give more than to take.

+ Destroy Shimei in me, he who cursed the Lord's anointed;
Lest I may run over together with him chasing the slaves, to lose my
covenant with You;

Lest I may run chasing the world You created to serve me;
And lose my soul You created to partake of Your glory forever;
By Your Spirit, bridle the energies of Shimei, who stirs disturbance up, and threatens peace;

Who can confine and destroy the energies of corruption, but You?!

+ Drive away Abiathar the priest, the formal in his worship;
And replace him with Zadok, the spiritual in his worship;
Take away from me every pretence, to live by the Spirit;
Drive away every foreign thought, even if it seems holy to me;
Drive it away together with Abiathar the priest from Jerusalem to Anathoth;
That such a thought would never occupy a place in Your altar inside me

+ Behold, Adonijah moves to take my kingdom by force;
He seeks Abishag a wife to take away my throne;
By the spirit of wisdom, grant me to keep wisdom as my bride;
By the spirit of firmness, grant me to destroy the deceptive devil;
Let the devil be destroyed, and set Your throne in me.

+ Grant me not to be deceived by the tricks of Adonijah;
For the devil utters smooth, yet deadly words;
Grant me the wisdom, lest the devil would take Your throne away from my heart;
Lest he denies me my kingdom, and destroys my soul

+ By Your Spirit, O Lord, I become strong, and will never fear;
He is my keeper from Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab, and Shimei;
My keeper from the thoughts intending to deceive me by their smoothness;
Take away from me every deception and malice;
For You are the destroyer of all the hosts of evil;

You are the Grantor of peace to Your kingdom in me.

=====

***“And Your servant is in the midst of Your people
whom You have chosen, a great people too numerous
to be numbered or counted.***

***Therefore give to Your servant an
understanding heart
to judge Your people, that I may
discern between good
and evil. For who is able to judge
this great people of
Yours?”***

(1 Kings 3: 8 – 9)

WISDOM AND RICHES OF SOLOMON

(Chapters 3 and 4)

CHAPTER 3

SOLOMON CHOOSES WISDOM

The last chapter told us about the establishment of Solomon's kingdom; Now, he starts his history as a king by his marriage to an Egyptian princess; together with a note concerning the state of the kingdom at the beginning of his reign (1 – 3). That is followed by offering sacrifices mixed with prayers in Gibeon, as a way to sanctify the kingdom through seeking the help and blessing from the Lord (4). Appearing to Solomon, and asking what He shall give him 5 – 8), Solomon did not ask for riches, but chose wisdom to be able to reign on his people (9, 10). God granted him what he asked for, and what he did not ask (11 -15); and to demonstrate his exalted spirit of wisdom, he issues a just verdict before the whole people (16 – 28).

Gibeon was where the tabernacle of the meeting and the bronze altar were located at that time (1 Chronicles 21: 29); about 10 miles north-west of Jerusalem, although the ark of the covenant was in Jerusalem (15).

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|---|---------|
| 1- Solomon marries an Egyptian princess | 1 - 3 |
| 2- The Lord appears to Solomon | 4 - 7 |
| 3- Solomon chooses wisdom, and not riches | 8 - 15 |
| 4- A demonstration of the exalted wisdom of Solomon | 16 – 28 |

1- SOLOMON MARRIES AN EGYPTIAN ORINCESS: (1 – 3)

Having his kingdom well-established, Solomon did not waste time to make a treaty with the Pharaoh king of Egypt, the most prominent military power at the time, which he did by his marriage to his daughter, who, has apparently accepted the worship of the living God. Feeling the growth of the power of Israel, Egypt, in its turn, welcomed such an arrangement, for, on the political aspect, that marriage gave stability to the two countries.

According to some scholars, Solomon was wrong not to heed God's commandment, saying, *"Take heed to yourself, lest you take of his daughters (of the inhabitant of the land) for your sons, and their daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods"* (Exodus 34: 16); *"Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods, so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly"* (Deuteronomy 7: 3, 4). And when Nehemiah took upon himself to reform the ways of those who returned from captivity, he came against those who got married to women from Ashdod, Amon, and Moab (Nehemiah 13: 23, 24), because of whom they have lost even their ability to talk Hebrew as they should. To them he said: *"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet, among nations there was no king like him, who was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?"* (Nehemiah 13: 26, 27).

Yet, marriage to an Egyptian woman was not against the law, which banned marriage to Canaanite women (Exodus 34: 16; Deuteronomy 7: 3); while permitting marriage to a captive woman in war (Deuteronomy 21: 10 etc.). But to

do it according to the law, the bride was committed to deny the idols and to enter into faith of Jehovah, something which the daughter of Pharaoh has obviously done; on account of that we find Solomon, himself, in the early years of his reign, deny the idols; And that we hear nothing of the infiltration of any Egyptian paganism into Israel in the days of Solomon. That Egyptian wife was actually separated from all the other foreign wives who have drawn Solomon to their gods (11: 1)

That politically motivated marriage was done by Solomon to concentrate his effort upon building the temple of the Lord, his own palace, the walls of Jerusalem, and the rest of his projects.

“Now Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh’s daughter; then he brought her to the city of David until he had finished building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall all around Jerusalem” (1)

The Historian Josephus was wrong in writing that that king of Egypt was the last to carry the title of ‘Pharaoh’.

The daughter of Pharaoh came to the city of David, Jerusalem, before the building of the temple of the Lord was finished in the eleventh year of Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 6: 1; 37 – 38). The city of David was set upon the eastern mountain, namely, the true Zion, where the temple was later built. Solomon built his Egyptian wife a house of her own, as it is said, *“Now Solomon brought the Pharaoh’s daughter up from the city of David to the home which he had built for her, for he said, ‘my wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places to which the ark of the Lord has come are holy”* (2 Chronicles 8: 11).

“Meanwhile the people sacrificed at the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days” (2)

The high places: According to the divine commandment presented by God to the prophet Moses, before their entrance into the promised land: *“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods on the high mountains and on the hills, and under every green tree ... You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things. But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes to put His name for His habitation; and there you shall go. There, you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks”* (Deuteronomy 12: 2 – 7). The commandment came, not to offer their sacrifices except at the door of the tabernacle (Leviticus 17: 3-5); Was it therefore, a sin on the people to offer them on the high places?

According to some, those commandments were to prepare the people to practice the concentrated worship at a specific location (the temple of Solomon) when it is built; And consequently, it was not counted as sin, to practice the collective worship, and to offer the sacrifices anywhere before that temple was built; as proved by the worship of Jehovah on the high places, after the days of the judges (Judges 6: 25; 13: 16; 1 Samuel 7: 10; 13: 9; 14: 35; 16: 5; 1 Chronicles 21: 26), with no feelings of remorse on the part of those who offered them.

* The fathers Patriarchs, the prophets, the judges, and the kings, have offered sacrifices on the high places, up to the days of Solomon, on account of that the temple was not yet built.

* According to some, the term, ‘high places’ does not mean a high mountain or hill, but it means every location on which sacrifices were offered

- * Solomon offered 1000 burnt offerings on the great high place (4), where God appeared to him, to ask what he shall give him; without showing that He was offended by that action.
- * Abraham, the father of fathers set altars on the high places (Genesis 12: 8; 22: 2).
- * What preoccupied David's mind was to practice worship before the ark of the covenant, that was not yet settled down at a specific place, without being bound to a specific mountain or hill.

“And Solomon loved the Lord walking in the statutes of his father David; except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places” (3)

Solomon was called ‘Jedidiah’ (2 Samuel 12: 24), namely, (the Lord's beloved). Now we see him pay the Lord's love back with love; for he loved the Lord dearly; and translated that love by walking in the statutes of the Lord, the way his father David did, and charged him to do (1 Kings 2: 2-3; 1 Chronicles 28: 9-10).

Despite Solomon's great love for God, yet he erred by offering sacrifices and burning incense at the high places, banned by the law, on account of that the pagan worship was connected to high places (Leviticus 17: 3 – 14; Deuteronomy 12: 13 – 14; Ezekiel 6: 3 – 4; Hosea 10: 8).

Confessing that he is a young man of little experience, and the responsibilities of reigning are too great and formidable; Solomon sought from the Lord to grant him an obedient heart and wisdom, to be able to lead the people of God; and to discern between what is good, and what is evil.

- + If David – God's friend, and Solomon – God's beloved, were overcome by sin like all men, their falls are meant to warn us, and their repentance

leads us to salvation. For, who, in such a deceptive life can confirm his immunity to falling into sin?!

(St. Jerome)

2- THE LORD APPEARS TO SOLOMON: (4 – 7)

“Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on the altar” (4)

As God presented much to Solomon, Solomon paid Him back a little from that much, namely, a thousand burnt offerings.

Some may wonder: was that not a waste of the animal resources?! Would it not be more prudent to offer those sacrifices to the poor?!

This may be, according to the human material logic, that may considers even a prayer a waste of time, and the offerings a waste of animal resources. They do not perceive the value of mutual love between God and man, which could never be valued in money or time!

Offering 1000 burnt offerings on one altar in a single day, carries many meanings:

* The figure 1000 refers to spiritual and heavenly issues; it refers to offering the sacrifice of the spiritual heart, which walks in the heavenlies.

* Burning all this number in one day, refers to the work of God, *“the Consuming fire”*, He who dwells upon us, as a personal altar, to devour by

His fire our offerings of love, accepted with pleasure by Him.

* If the burnt offering refers to the heart, wholly enflamed by the fire of love; such a great number of sacrifices refers to God’s thirst for our continuous love.

Solomon presented those animal sacrifices, and the priests slaughtered and offered them on one altar (1 Kings 8: 5); a task that would take several days; on account of that each burnt offering has to be completely consumed by fire, which, according to the law, would never be quenched, but burns day and night.

Gibeon: A city on a hill, that had its fame by the presence of the old tabernacle of the meeting, including the bronze altar, made by the prophet Moses in the wilderness (1 Chronicles 16: 39; 21: 29; 2 Chronicles 1: 3-6); moved from 'Nob', and set on that high place. That hill, with an elevation of 500 – 600 feet, the highest point in the region, is about one mile far from Gibeon.

“At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; And God said, ‘Ask, What shall I give you?!’” (5

We would expect that Solomon, being a young man, to gather some statesmen around him, and start the ordinance of affairs. But Solomon put God ahead of everything else; and set forth to the altar of the Lord in Gibeon to spend days and nights worshipping God, offering sacrifices, and asking Him with zeal to grant him the divine wisdom, That is why Solomon was worthy of seeing the Lord in a dream.

In Gibeon, where the high place, the tabernacle of the meeting and the bronze altar were located (2 Chronicles 1: 3), Solomon offered a multitude of sacrifices, the Lord appeared to him. God longs to appear to everyone; and, on His part, He is ready to proclaim His presence to His believers; Yet, on our part, if we have to give God the priority in our life, and not be preoccupied with our daily worries; We have, first, to ascend, as though to Gibeon, to spend days and nights with Him; For then, shall find Him come down to us, to transfigure in our hearts, to talk to us; and to proclaim to us His amazing generosity, and His longing to grant us Himself.

Let us ascend by the Holy Spirit of God up to the spiritual 'Gibeon', so that our hearts be lifted up to heaven, and that the mire of this world would not be able to blind our eyes, and keep us from beholding Him, He who condescends to transfigure before them.

On the high places of 'Gibeon', we offer precious burnt offerings in the sight of God. As our Christ has offered Himself a sacrifice of love to reconcile us to His heavenly Father, we would have the privilege to offer our life "*a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service*" (Roman 12: 1). We long to have our whole being enflamed by the divine fire, as though on a divine altar, to become a sacrifice of love, rejoicing to the heavenly creatures.

Having our hearts preoccupied all day long with the exalted love of God, wherever we are, when our hearts are lifted up in 'Gibeon', God will appear to us in a dream. In the tranquility of the night God looks down on the believing heart to sanctify it by His divine righteousness; so that the believer would say together with the prophet David: "*Let Your eyes look at the things that are upright. You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me, and have found nothing; I have proposed that my mouth shall not transgress*" (Psalm 17: 2, 3).

In the tranquility of the night, while man's senses are silenced, God would appear to the mind to talk to it. Presenting to us his living experience, (Mar) Isaac says: **[Silence your tongue, to let your heart talk; And silence your heart, to let God talk].**

God appeared twice to Solomon in a dream ... And according to St. Gregory bishop of Nyssa about the different kinds of dreams, he says that our body members and our brain are like a musical string instrument, on which, during the day, the mind plays a magnificent harmonious symphony. Going to sleep, this instrument would not be able to produce any sound, unless the memories of the

day come back to present themselves to the mind while sleeping, as a dream, the way the strings keep on producing a gentle echo, directly after the hand of the musician stops touching them.

God said: *“Ask, What shall I give you?”* (5). ... If Solomon, all day long, was preoccupied with prayers and offering sacrifices, seeking wisdom from God, Why does God say to him, *“Ask, What shall I give you?”*. All day long, Solomon presented his empty vessels to the Lord to fill them with the heavenly oil; and here, asking him just before giving him, is to confirm his free will to enjoy what his heart asks. That is why the Lord Christ said to His disciples: *“until now you have asked nothing in My name; Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be full”* (John 16: 24). ; And St. John the apostle says: *“Now, this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to his will He will hear us”* (1 John 5: 14).

Nothing preoccupies the minds of the children of God, whose hearts are enflamed with the divine love, like the enjoyment of beholding God. Moses the prophet in the Old Covenant started his ministry by beholding God through the burning bush; and kept seeing God practically through His dealing with him on a daily basis in his personal life, and in his ministry among the people. He enjoyed the divine glory that reflected upon his face to make it shine. Moses enjoyed encountering God on Mount Sinai. Yet his final request was “Shoe me Your face”; a request that was fulfilled to him in a magnificent way after about 2000 years, when he and Elijah appeared to behold the Lord Christ transfigure on Mount Tabor, and to speak to Him.

Solomon the sage enjoyed beholding the Lord twice: after being enthroned a king, and when he dedicated the temple.

The thirst of the true believer to behold God in every possible way, will therefore not cease until he encounter His heavenly beloved, face to face; an encounter

that will not only happen in the life to come, but is an extension of the life actually lived every day by the believer.

St. Erinaos discerns between three kinds of vision, each of which is, however, included in the other two:

a- The prophetic vision through the Holy Spirit. Like the vision received by Moses the prophet on the rock, as a reference to seeing God through

the incarnation (the rock of His human coming); a symbolic vision, in which the real face of God is only seen through a sacramental way

. When Moses the prophet requested a more clear vision, it was fulfilled to him when the Lord transfigured to him together with the prophet Elijah on Mount Tabor.

b- The vision of adoption through the incarnated Son.

c- The vision of the Father in the kingdom of God, in the life to come; namely, the eschatological vision.

“And Solomon said, ‘You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You. You have continued this great kindness for him, and you have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day’” (6).

Asked by the Lord what He will give him, Solomon started by giving Him thanks upon His gifts to his father, counting what God gave to Solomon as a divine gift, as being given to David his father, of the upright heart. Solomon inherited from his father the mouth blessing God for His gifts; he who said: *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who has given one to sit on my throne this day while my eyes*

see it" (1 kings 1: 48). In his veins runs the blessing of the Lord on His gifts; to bless Him, not only by day, but even in his dreams by night, to say, together with his father David, *"I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons"* (Psalm 16: 7)

With great reverence Solomon talked to God about his father, who walked in His ways, saying, *"He walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You"*. He talked with a heart flowing with thanksgiving to God who showed His great mercy to His servant David. That is how it is befitting of us to thank and praise God for the sake of His dealings with our fathers and mothers and all the past generations.

"Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant a king instead of my father David; but I am a little child, I do not know how to go or come in" (7)

After blessing God for the sake of His gifts to his father David, by setting his son a king; With great humility he proclaimed that he, as a little child, does not know how to go or to come in without help; he is like an infant training to walk, in need of someone to hold his hand to lead him. He counted himself a child with no understanding nor experience; he, whom his father called him wise (1 kings 2: 9).

3- SOLOMON CHOOSES WISDOM, AND NOT RICHES: (15-18)

"And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (8-9)

Solomon did not say 'my people', but "*Your people*"; for he is not the real king, but His representative, an ambassador of the King of kings, who works in the midst of the people of God, not his own people. If the Lord has chosen that people and that king; it is the Lord who works and cares for the people, and is worshipped by him whom he has chosen, who is in need of understanding and wisdom to minister to the people of his Master. He perceived that "*the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding*" (Proverb 2: 6); and according to the words of the apostle, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him*" (James 1: 7).

God is the Fountain of every wisdom, knowledge, and understanding; and the true wise are just channels through which God flows His wisdom and understanding over many. As according to St. John Chrysostom: [The divine wisdom is a shield to the men of God who walk with uprightness, a help for them to get conquest. For, as we hold fast to, and keep wisdom, it holds fast and keeps us as well], And, according to St. Clement of Alexandria, [Those who are justified by philosophy, knowledge will lead them to godliness as a helper].

Solomon did not seek wisdom in general to boast with it on others, but to minister to the people of his Master with the spirit of godliness, and to judge among them with the spirit of faithfulness. The king in the old times used to act as a judge among the people, particularly in the major issues.

- + The true faith and the sound teaching, proclaim that both graces are from God; as according to the Holy Book: "*From His mouth come knowledge and understanding*"; and, "*Love is of God*" (1 John 4: 7).
- + "*The Lord gives wisdom; and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding*" (Proverbs 2: 6). From Him men get the longing, itself, for understanding, melded with godliness.

(St. Augustine)

“And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon has asked for this” (10)

Solomon's request, that came in a dream, revealed what was in the depths of his heart of the spirit of thanksgiving to God, the reverence to his father, the humility, and the desire to minister to the people of God with faithfulness and wisdom. God was pleased with what Solomon carried of holy will; as well as with his offerings coming from the purity of his heart, and with his prayers, supplications, day and even by night in his dreams.

Solomon's wisdom, who has got the gift of a wise heart, was shown in:

- * He asked God to grant him the understanding heart by which he could reign unto the people of God (3: 9)..
- * He bore an inner insight with the spirit of discernment (3: 16-28).
- * He surpassed all other wise men (4: 29-31).
- * He uttered 3000 proverbs (4: 32); 1005 songs (4: 32), among which are the two psalms 72 and 127. ... Many people came to him from all over the world to hear his wisdom, like the queen of Sheba (10: 1-9). ... Many of the proverbs of Israel, Ethiopia, and Arabia, have their origin with Solomon the sage.
- * With wisdom he stood before the temple (6, 5).
- * With wisdom he raised the prayer of dedication (8: 22-53).
- * By the proclamation of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the books of proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of songs.
- * He proved to have an understanding in many scientific fields, like Botany, Zoology, and Ichthyology (4: 33; Proverbs 30: 24-31; Ecclesiastes 2:

4-6).

- * He issued an incredible judgment in a case between two women, each of whom claimed to be the mother of an infant (3: 16-28).

But his wisdom was however smeared by::

- * The exaggerated luxurious way of life (32; 4: 22; 10: 21)
- * His marriage to foreign heathen women (11: 1, 2; Nehemiah 13: 23-26).
- * His exaggerated sensitivity (11: 3).
- * His deflection to idol-worship (11: 4-10).
- * He used to do what seemed right in his own eyes (11: 33).
- * His oppression of the people (12: 4).

“Then God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies; but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, Behold I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you” (11-12)

Because Solomon asked for himself understanding to discern justice; namely, asked for the practical wisdom, through which he can practice the life befitting of a believer, God granted him the practical and mental wisdom, so that there has not been anyone like him, nor shall any like him arise after him; until the time comes when He who is greater than Solomon Will come (Matthew 12: 42; Luke 11: 31).

+ Solomon got his authority, not by a lot, nor by force, but by the Holy Spirit of God. ...

“To know wisdom and instruction” (Proverb 1: 2). Those who easily know the true heavenly knowledge, will also get to learn the secrets of the Word; *“To perceive the words of understanding: (Proverbs 1: 2). For things uttered in a vague language by the Holy Spirit, will be perceptible for those who have upright hearts by the Lord.*

(St.

Hypolitus)

“And I have also given you what you have not asked; both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days” (13)

Asking the kingdom and righteousness of God, We shall get, as well, all the temporal blessings, material things, and true honor (Matthew 6: 33). Asking from God His exalted heavenly grace; He will grant us, beside it, all our temporal needs. For enjoying the divine grace, all the earthly goods will be for our good; whereas without it, those goods will enslave our souls.

“So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes, and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen Your days” (14)

God promised to lengthen his days if he walked in His ways, kept His statutes and commandments, as His father David did; But having failed to fulfill that promise, he consequently died about 59 or 60 years .of age.

Having asked the right thing, you can see how fast Solomon has got his wish. This teaches us to pray: with zeal, and for the right thing.

“And Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a dream; and he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants” (15).

After consummating the spiritual service in Gibeon, in the tabernacle of the meeting, Solomon set forth to the other center of worship in Jerusalem, on Mount Zion, where there was the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6: 13), There he set a great feast together with peace offerings. In Gibeon all the sacrifices had to be completely burnt as a sign of dedicating the whole heart to God. But concerning the peace offerings, portions of the meat of the sacrifice were given to the Levites,

the strangers, the fatherless and the widows (Deuteronomy 1: 29), a sign of the bond to the practical church life, to the giving, and to the care for the needy,

Solomon awoke, and it was indeed a dream from God, in which he enjoyed a divine proclamation, or a divine appearance. He awoke exultant by the Spirit, having seen the Lord, and having got in touch with His love and compassion. And wishing for all the people to partake of his inner joy, he set for them a great spiritual feast. The living leader is he who enjoys joy in the Lord, and make his brethren partake of his joy.

Solomon started practicing judgment with the wise heart granted to him by God; by which he got the fear of his people, a reflection of the glory promised to him by God.

4- A DEMONSTRATION OF THE EXALTED WISDOM OF SOLOMON: (16 - 28)

“Then two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him. And one woman said, ‘O my lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and I gave birth while she was in the house. Then it happened, the third day after I had given birth that this woman also gave birth. And we were together, there was no one with us in the house, except the two of us in the house’” (16, 18).

“And this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on him. So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was dead. But when I had examined him

*in the morning , indeed he was not my son, whom I had borne'.
Then the other woman said, 'No, but the living
one is my son, and the dead one is your son'. And the first woman
said, 'No, but the dead one is your son and
the living one is my son'. Thus they spoke before the king" (19 - 22)*

All the people were waiting to hear what Solomon would rule, probably expecting him to cast a lot to know who the true mother was.

*"And the king said, 'The one says this is my son who lives, and your son is the dead one; and the other says, No,
But your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one'. Then
the king said, 'Bring me a sword. So they
brought a sword before the king. And the king said, 'Divide the
living child in two, and give half to one, and the
other half to the other". Then the woman whose son was living
spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion
for her son, and she said, O my lord, Give her the living child, and
by no means kill him'; But the other said,' Let him
be neither mine nor yours, but divide him'. So the king answered
and said, 'Give the first woman the living child,
and by no means kill him, she is his mother'. (23 - 27).*

When the king ordered to divide the living child, many who were there were probably disturbed within themselves, and counted the king's order strange, and even unwise, for it entails killing a guiltless child; And they probably wondered in their depths, 'Is this the wisdom of the new king, the one chosen by God? Is this the wisdom he received from God when He appeared to him in a dream? ... In the law it came: "*If one man's ox hurts another's, so that it dies; then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it, and the dead ox they shall also divide*" (Exodus 21: 35). If that concern an ox, how could the king order dividing a

living child to die, and neither women will get him?! Yet, proclaiming his final verdict after knowing the true mother, all perceived his wisdom, and that, *"the hearts of the kings are unsearchable"* (Proverbs 25: 3).

The heart of the true mother, yearning with compassion for her son, asked the king to give her own son to the other woman rather than seeing him killed. It is as though she says: I would rather see her have him than to see him dead; She had hope, eventually, to enjoy him; as it is written, *"There is hope in your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border"* (Jeremiah 31: 17).

'And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered, and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice'" (28)

According to St. Ambrose, It is the right of the Lord Christ alone, the true Joshua, to divide the promised land among the tribes; the true Solomon alone, who divides the Word by the sword of the Spirit, saying: [The right to divide concerns the Lord alone; and expresses this by the terms: the Word, namely, by the spiritual sword of the true Solomon].

According to St. Ambrose, the true Solomon chose the church for which He bore true love, by the Spirit of discernment; And that the woman whose son is living is St. Mary whose soul is pierced by the sword of God.

Presenting to us a fatherly interpretation of the episode of Solomon the sage and the two women, Father Caesarius bishop of Arle says:

[Now, if you optionally choose to listen, I intend to present to your ears what the saintly fathers said in this concern:

The woman who cried out to let the child live, refers the (catholic church); and the other evil woman who cried out to have him divided, refers to the Arian heresy. The (catholic church) is like a very godly mother, who cries out before all heretics, saying: [Do not make Christ less than the Father; Do not divide His unity; Do not divide the One God into diverse levels, and different forms. Keep Him whole with you. If you wish to have peace, Do not divide His unity. If you have the whole, everything will remain yours. Great is the wholeness of His might; When all possess Him whole; and everyone possesses Him as well. The evil heresy cries out, 'No, Divide Him' (26). What does "Divide Him" mean, but that the Son is not equal to the Father? Taking the equality of the Son and the Father away, is to deny that the Father is good and wholly mighty. If God the Father is capable of giving birth to the Son like Him, and did not intend to do that, He, therefore, is not Good; And If He intends to do that, and could not, He, therefore, is not Mighty. Be sure, brethren, that no one among the Arians can answer this fact; but, once they find themselves caught in a corner by the true logic, they resort, like a slippery serpent to some kind of distorted words. Be put to shame, O violent and evil Arian heresy. You are all evil, for not being a mother! You demand dividing the newly born, whom you have not begotten. Your heart has become cruel].

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 Kings 3

GRANT ME YOURSELF, O

WISDOM OF GOD

- + In Gibeon, Solomon sacrificed to You 1000 burnt offerings;
Grant me to present to You my life, an unceasing burnt offering;
Appear to me as You did to Solomon;
Who, in humility, felt like a little child;
Who is in need for Your heavenly wisdom to reign on Your people;
What should I ask, but to acquire You, O Wisdom of God?!

- + By You, I can reign on the people in my heart;
By You. I can judge with wisdom;
By You I can discern between good and evil;
I have nothing more to seek but to acquire You;
By You, O Wisdom of God, I can live and have progress in everything.

- + By Your wisdom, Solomon knew how to give the infant to his true mother;
He could discern between the true and the false mother;
Grant me the Spirit of discernment, to recognize the church, the true mother;
To recognize the one with the spirit of truth, from that with the spirit of deception.

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CHAPTER 4

SOLOMON'S AUTHORITY, WISDOM, AND RICHES

Solomon started his reign by encountering God, the King of kings, who chose him to reign on His people; like a steward who gets back to his Master before starting his job, to fulfill his will. He offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to proclaim his love and thanksgiving for the One who chose him; and raised prayers day and night. And when God appeared to him, he asked Him nothing other than to be granted the heavenly wisdom.

Now he began his task by setting what was like a council of ministers (or secretaries) to work through them. His kingdom has extended according to the divine promises to the father Patriarchs, Abraham in particular; And he had favor in the sight of the kings all around him. His era was characterized by peace and prosperity; he entered into huge enterprises, and has got an exalted fame concerning his wisdom and literate productivity, including writing 3000 proverbs, 1005 songs, and some holy books by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ; beside great works in the fields of Botany, Zoology, and Ichthyology. And He built, as well, the temple of the Lord.

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1- Solomon's council of ministers | 1 - 20 |
| 2- The financial ordinance of the state | 21 - 28 |
| 3- Solomon's exalted fame | 29 – 34 |

1- SOLOMON'S COUNCIL OF MINISTERS: (10 – 20)

Solomon set what is like a council of ministers (secretaries), to carry out the affairs of the state under his supervision, beside 12 governors over all Israel (7).

The council of ministers were formed of the following officials:

- Azariah the son of Zadok, the priest, as the senior secretary.
- Elihoreph and Ahijah, as secretaries of the general affairs of the state.
- Jehoshaphat; responsible for the historical records concerning the royal events.
- Benaiah, over the army to defend the nation.
- Zadok and Abiathar the priests; responsible for the religious issues, and keeping the law of God.
- Azariah the son of Nathan; as the head over the 12 governors.
- Zabod, the personal secretary and special counselor of the king.
- Ahishar; over the household, and special needs of the royal wing.
- :Adoniram; as the general manager of the working force.

Solomon's wisdom was obvious in establishing an elaborate system for the state on all aspects. And it is to be noticed that no priority was given to the military side, the way it has been in the days of his father David.

“So king Solomon was king over all Israel” (1)

Not, like his father David who started his reign as king over Judea alone, for as long as seven and a half years.

“And these were his officials: Azariah the son of Zadok the priest” (2)

‘Azariah’ or ‘Azariahu’, a Hebrew word meaning (helped by Jehovah), brother of ‘Ahimaaz’. According to some, he could not be a grandson of Zadok the high priest, the Supporter of Solomon, but another Zadok. The word ‘priest’ (hakoheen) here, as it came in the Chaldean version, is also equivalent to (prince). It is obvious that there were priests in the council of ministers, who

beside doing their religious task, they did their role as friends and counselors of the king; the way it was with some prophets and priests in the later eras.

According to some, being put on the top of the list refers to his position as the head of the council of ministers, beside being the high priest (1 Chronicles 6: 10). And the word 'priest' in the text refers to 'Azariah', himself, and not to 'Zadok'.

*“Elihoreph and Ahijah the sons of Shisha, scribes;
Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, the recorder” (2)*

‘Elihoreph’ a Hebrew word, probably means (God grants the fruitful autumn). **‘Ahijah’**, a Hebrew name, means (brother or friend of Jehovah); And **‘Shisha’** probably the same “Seraiah” in 2 Samuel 8: 17, and Sheva in 2 Samuel 20: 25), also called ‘Shusha’, (1 Chronicles 18: 16), an Aramic name, means (the sun). They were both “scribes”, like (General secretaries of State), of the most prominent among his counselors; whose responsibilities were publishing the kings laws, writing down his messages, and probably taking care of his finances (1 Kings 12: 10). In the days of David, there was only one scribe; but now with the great extension of the kingdom, came the need for a special department of secretaries.

‘Jehoshaphat’, a Hebrew word, means (Jehovah judges), the son of ‘Ahilud’, who supported David (2 Samuel 8: 16; 20: 24); responsible for recording the history of the royal events, and for reminding the king of the past events, to benefit in his judgment of the contemporary ones. He served both David and Solomon (2 Samuel 8: 16-18), as the official Historian.

*“Benaiah the son of Jehoiadah over the army; Zadok
and Abiathar the priests” (4)*

‘Benaiah’, a Hebrew word means (built by Jehovah), supported Solomon to establish his throne (1 Kings 1: 8); famed for his courage and valor on several occasions (2 Samuel 22: 20-23). Became the commander of the army after Joab; responsible for defending the nation, caring for the provision of weapons, chariots, and horses, for the general discipline and movements of the armed forces, beside his responsibility of securing and protecting the royal palaces.

‘Zadok’ and **‘Abiathar’** the priests. responsible for the religious affairs and keeping the law of God. Zadok, a Hebrew name, means (true, faithful, and righteous), the son of ‘Ahitob’, a descendant of ‘Eleazar’, the son of “Aaron”. (1 Chronicles 24: 3). He was most probably the young man who came to David in Hebron, together with the rulers of Israel, to turn Saul’s kingdom to David (1 Chronicles 12: 27-28). Together with Abiathar the son of ‘Ehimelech’, they joined David in his escape from Jerusalem, carried the ark of the Lord, before the king commanded them to return with the ark to the capital until the end of the conflict (2 Samuel 15: 24-29). After the death of Absalom, the king asked them to help convince the elders of Judah to bring him back to the throne (2 Samuel 19: 11).

How could the name of ‘Abiathar’ as a high priest come together with Zadok, when he was ordered by king Solomon to stay in his fields at Anathoth (1 Kings 2: 27)? It could be explained by the fact that Solomon removed him from practicing his priestly work, but did not deprive him of the honor and title of priesthood. According to some scholars, Zadok has been the high priest, and Abiathar has been his deputy; the way it will be later with ‘Annas’ and ‘Caiaphas’ at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. The prevailing view was that Zadok was appointed by King Saul as the high priest, while Abiathar was appointed by King David; and that Solomon, for political reasons chose to have the two of them together.

‘Abiathar’, a Hebrew word, means (father of goodness) or (father of superiority). The Lord Christ referred to him, saying. *“Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him, how he went into the*

house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest and ate the showbread which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?" (Mark 2: 26). He remained faithful to David when his son Absalom rebelled against him, but joined forces with Joab and Shimei when his son Adonijah rebelled against him, and tried to take the throne by force.

"Azariah the son of Nathan over the officers; Zabud the son of Nathan, a priest and the king's friend" (5)

Azariahu was appointed by Solomon as a general Steward and head of the 12 governors (7). It is not known whether he was the son of Nathan the prophet, a supporter of king Solomon, or of Nathan the son of David; yet the title (over the officers) here, (cohen) or (kohen) were given to all the sons of David (2 Samuel 8: 18); which makes it more probable that he was the son of Nathan, the son of David (2 Samuel 5: 14), rather than being the son of Nathan the prophet.

'Zabud' the son of Nathan Zabod is a Hebrew name, means (talented), the personal secretary and counselors of the king's private affairs.

"Ahishar over the household; and Adiniran the son of Abda over the labor force" (6)

'Ahishar', a Hebrew word, means (brother of the upright man), over the household, to care for its affairs, for those of the royal wing in particular. The importance of that post was apparent in what was mentioned in 2 Kings 18: 18, when the Assyrian king sent a huge army to Jerusalem and its commander called for the king, who sent to him instead 'Eliakim' who was over the household, whose name came before the scribe and the recorder; namely the king considered him his senior deputy to carry out the debate in such serious issues that touched the wellbeing of the nation. That was also apparent in what came in Isaiah 22: 15- 25.

'Adoniram', or 'Adoram' (2 Samuel 20: 24; I Chronicles 12: 18), or 'Hadoram' (2 Chronicles 10: 18), the son of 'Abda', over the labor force, the general manager of the royal projects. He remained in his post until the days of Rehoboam, who sent him to those who rebelled against him, to be stoned to death (1 Kings 12: 18; 2 Chronicles 10: 18),

"And Solomon had twelve governors over all Israel who provided food for the king and his household, each one made provision for one month of the year" (7)

Solomon adopted a system of governorates, putting a governor on each of the twelve governorate, whose main job was to provide the royal household with its food needs (27), and to collect taxes to spend on the king's projects (22-23), on the huge army (28, 26), and on building the temple; although king David has already prepared an abundance of building materials and possibilities. It is to be noticed that no governor was appointed on the portion of Judah, as a kind of privilege to the royal tribe,

The twelve governors were not rulers under the king (chamberlains), to carry out the state affairs, but their main responsibility was to collect the taxes, which was not in cash but rather as a portion of the crops. Solomon's buildings, the expenses of his household, with the multitude of elite visitors, his great generosity, the luxury of his attires and those of the members of his royal court, have all been on the expense of the people; the enormity of which caused some kind of grumbling; warned against by the prophet Samuel when the people demanded a king like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8: 1-12); and realized by Solomon himself. Those governors, because of the nature of their work, had some kind of authority; And here are their names:

*“Ben Hur, in the mountains of
Ephraim” (8)*

It is befitting of us here to say that, together with his wisdom, and his abilities of discipline and ordinance, Solomon was characterized by a spirit of humility; Several of Solomon’s officers were previously appointed by his father David; and Solomon, without arrogance or haughtiness, did not disregard his father’s wisdom and experience, and kept a great number of them. Many children wrongly assume that their strong personality is shown by an utter change of what they have inherited from their parents. So many rulers do with what they inherit of their predecessors. The successful son or ruler is he who mixes his wisdom with humility, and does not despise the work of his predecessors.

Solomon, appointed as well many of the sons of the priests and prophets, for, after his father the prophet and priest, he inherited his trust in the men of God, and his faith in God’s blessing in ordaining all issues.

“Ben Hur”: In upper Egypt and in Syria, men are referred to, not by their names but as “the son of ...”. According to some, those governors were young men who were appointed in their positions for their fathers’ sakes.

The province of ‘Ben Hur’ was in the mountains of Ephraim, extending from Jerusalem northwards to ‘Jezreel, a fertile land, given the name ‘Samaria’ in the New Testament.

*“Ben-Deker, in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh,
and Elon Beth Hanan” (9)*

‘Ben Deker’ a Hebrew word, means (a side).

‘Shaalbim’, a Hebrew word, probably means (foxes), given to a province in Ephraim, through which king Saul passed, after leaving ‘Shalisha’ behind, searching for the lost donkeys of his father (1 Samuel 9: 4).

And ‘Elon Beth Hanan’, probably was in the land of the tribe of ‘Dan’.

“Ben-Hesed’, in Arubboth; to him belonged Socoh and all the land of Hepher” (10)

‘**Nen-Hesed**’, a Hebrew word, means (mercy, grace).

‘Arubboth’, a Hebrew word, means (energies), its location nowadays is at ‘Araba’, west of ‘Dothan’, and ‘Genin’ in the kingdom of Jordan.

‘Socoh’ or ‘Soko’, a Hebrew word, means (longings); called nowadays ‘Kherbet-Showeka’, where the Valley of ‘Shor’ bends westwards, to be called ‘Valley of ‘Sant’, (of Acacia), nine miles from ‘Beth-Gebrin’.

‘Hepher’, a Hebrew word, means (a pit or a well), a town west of the River Jordan (Joshua 12: 17); a province close to ‘Sokoh’, which, according to some is ‘Bishar’ Hill, on the Valley of ‘Hawareth’ in the plains of ‘Sharon’; And to others, it is nowadays ‘Mashhad’ in Judah.

“Ben-Abinadab in all the regions of Dor; he had ‘Taphath’, the daughter of Solomon as wife” (11)

‘Abinadab’, a Hebrew word, means (the father is generous). It was the custom of some rulers of the East to make strong family relationships with the prominent people of the nation, through giving them girls of the royal household in marriage. So did Solomon, who gave, ‘Abinadab, most probably his cousin, ‘Taphath’ his daughter in marriage.

‘Dor’, a Canaanite word, means (A dwelling place), eight miles north of Caesarea, whose king was defeated by Joshua (Joshua 12: 2, 23) within the

portion of 'Asher', then given to Manasseh (Joshua 17: 11). There are some remains of 'Dor', north of 'Tantor'.

'Taphath', a Hebrew word, means (a drop).

"Baana the son of Ahilud, in Taannach, Magiddo, and all Beth Shean, which is beside Zaretan below Jezreel, from Beth Shean to Abel Meholah, as far as the other side of Jokaneam" (12)

"Baana", a Hebrew word, means (son of anguish), was a governor on the southern province in the Valley of 'Jezreel', from 'Magiddo to the Jordan; he was probably brother of 'Jehoshaphath' the recorder.

'Taanach', a Canaanite word, means (A sandy land), on the frontier of 'Issachar', but was given to Manasseh (Joshua 17: 11; 1 Chronicles 7: 29), then to the Levites (Joshua 21: 15). And failing to drive the Canaanites out of it, Manasseh put a tax on them (Judges 1: 27). It is probably 'Aner' (1 Chronicles 6: 70).

'Taanach' hill is the location of the old town, between the lowland on the southern side of the plains of 'Jezreel', five miles south east of the old 'Magiddo'.

'Magiddo' or "Magedon", a town of Manasseh, within the portion of 'Issachar'; was called 'Armageddon' (Revelation 16: 16), namely, (The hill of Mageddon). Nowadays is replaced by 'Hill of Motasalleh', about twenty miles south east of Haifa, at the southern extremity of the mountain ranges that end by Mount Carmel in the North. There, some inscriptions were discovered that reveal the culture of the Canaanite civilization; and excavations revealed a tunnel leading to a spring of water, indicating their engineering abilities; as well as stables including 450 mangers, probably going back to the days of either Solomon or Ahab.

'Beth Shean', a Hebrew word means (house of tranquility), a town five miles west of the River Jordan; which, after the captivity it came to be the main city among the Decapolis (the ten cities) , called 'Scithopolis', in its place nowadays, 'Hill of Hesn', close to 'Bisan'; with its remains of temples, courts, amphitheatres,

horse racing courses, etc. that refer to its past greatness; Beside some ancient Egyptian remains, like a statue of Sisi, and Ramses II.

'Zaretan', a village north of 'Jezreel', between 'Beth Shean' and 'Adam' (Joshua 3: 16) in the land of Manasseh, within the lowland of 'Gor' of Jordan, close to 'Sokoth'. It was also called 'Aerda' (Judges 7: 22); According to some, it is replaced nowadays by 'Sartabah' town, and to others by 'Selekhat Hill', and to a third party, by 'Saidia Hills'.

'Abel Meholah', Hebrew word, means (dancing pasture), probably was located in the Valley of Jordan, where the prophet Elisha dwelt (1 Kings 19: 16). According to St. Jerome, it was ten Roman miles south of 'Bisan'; most probably close to 'Abi-Sefri' Hill, where the Valley of 'Maleh' meet the Valley of 'Helwah'.

'Jokaneam', a Hebrew word, means (Let the people arise), a passage on the Jordan, close to Beth-Shean.

"Ben-Geber in Ramoth Gilead, to him belonged the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh in Gilead, to him also belonged the region of Argob in Bashan – sixty large cities with walls and bronze gate-bars" (13)

'**Geber**' means (man or hero)

'**Ramoth Gilead**', a Hebrew word, means (Heights of Gilead), one of the most famous cities of 'Gad', east of the Jordan; given to the Levites, as a city of refuge (Deuteronomy 4: 43; Joshua 20: 8); also called 'Ramah' (2 Chronicles 22: 6); probably replaced nowadays by 'Tel-Ramith'

Hooot 'Jair', a Hebrew word, means (villages, or camps of Jair), towns with no walls, north-west of Bashan, in the province of 'Agob', which was taken over by 'Jair' from the tribe of Manasseh; sometimes refer to the eastern lands in the Jordan Valley, or to Canaan, west of the River; and other times, more widely, to the whole highland east of the River. The same name often refers to several regions of land (1 Chronicles 1: 21-23; Numbers 32-40, 41; 1 Kings 4: 13).

‘Argob’, a Hebrew word, means (a lump of mud), located on the frontier of ‘Gashor’ and ‘Maaka’; has been among the possession of ‘Og’, in the days the Israelites entered into Canaan. This province, at that time, including 60 fortified towns, was taken over by ‘Jair’ from the tribe of Manasseh; hence called after the name of ‘Jair’.

‘Bashaan’, a Hebrew word, means (a paved land), located east of the Jordan, between the towns of ‘harmon’ and Gilead (Numbers 21: 33), included ‘Horan’, ‘Golan’, and ‘Lagaa’, all of volcanic rocks and dirt, of high fertility, and with plenty of water; its eastern side goes through the **‘Drewz’ mountain**, the old ‘Mount Bashaan’, mentioned 60 times in the Holy Book.

“Ahinadab the son of Iddo in Mahanaim” (14)

‘Ahinadab’, a Hebrew name, means (My brother is noble or generous). ‘Mahanaim’, a Hebrew word, means (two camps), a town east of the Jordan, given to the tribe of ‘Gad’ (Joshua 13: 30), and to half the tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 13: 30); was probably divided into two parts, one belonged to ‘Gad’, and the other to ‘Manasseh’. The former part was given to the sons of Marrari, as a city of refuge (Joshua 21: 38; 1 Chronicles 6: 8); north of ‘Yabok’, well-known in the days of the kings, for being where Ishbosheth the son of Saul dwelt (2 Smuel 12; 2: 8); and where David went during his escape from his son Absalom (2 Samuel 17: 24; 1 Chronicles 2: 8); probably referred to in the Song of songs (6: 13); replaced nowadays by ‘Kherbet Mehna, north of Eglon.

“Ahimaz, in Nephtali, he also took Basemath the daughter of Solomon as wife” (15)

‘Ahimaz’, a Hebrew word, means (brother of disgust or of anger); according to some, he was the same ‘Ahimaz’ the son of ‘Zadok’ the high priest, who together with ‘Abiathar’, remained in Jerusalem during the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel

15: 27; 17: 15-21); and was the first to inform David about the defeat of Absalom (2 Samuel 18: 19-30).

‘Basmeth’ or ‘Basma’, a Hebrew word, means (sweet fragrance)

“Baanah the son of Hushai in Asher and Aloth” (16)

‘**Baanah**’ the son of ‘Hushai’, was probably the same ‘Hushai’ the faithful friend, and the wise counselor of David (2 Samuel 15: 32; 17: 5, etc.).

‘Asher’, a Hebrew word, means (happy or pleased)

‘Aloth’, a Hebrew word, means (a lady), located in the portion of the tribe of ‘Asher’.

“Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar” (17)

“**Jehoshaphat**’ the son of ‘Paruah’, a Hebrew word, means (Jehovah judges)

“Shimei, the son of Elah in Benjamin” (18)

‘**Shimei**’, the son of ‘Elah’, a Hebrew word, means (Jehovah’ hears), a Benjaminite hero of David.

“Geber the son of Uri, in the land of Gilead, in the country of Sihon, king of the Amorites and of Og king of Bashan; and he was the only governor who was in the land” (19)

‘Gilead’, a Hebrew word, means (solid, or tough); a mountain region east of the Jordan, extending to the land of the Arabs, including the modern Balkaa; a rocky rough land (Deuteronomy 34: 1; 2 Samuel 2: 9). In Gilead, there was a kind of

trees that produce an acid material, called 'Balm of Gilead' with a medicinal effect (Jeremiah 8: 22; 46: 11), of sticky milky nature, that quickly freezes, used in treating inflammations. In the days of Alexander the Great, its weight valued was twice that of silver.

'Geber the son of Uri', was probably the same 'Geber', mentioned in verse 13.

"Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand of the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing" (20)

2- THE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF THE STATE: (21 – 28)

"So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life" (21)

Solomon's empire. Like all the other Asian empires in the days of Persia, was formed of a number of small kingdoms ruled by their own kings, who brought annual tributes.

"from the river"; namely, the kingdom extended from the River Euphrates, according to the divine promise to Abraham, to the prophet Moses, and to Joshua the son of Nun; the most important of those kingdoms has been Syria, Moab, and Emmon, located between the River Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea coast, North of the frontier of Egypt.

Bringing tributes meant paying taxes, as mentioned in 2 Samuel 2: 8, etc.

'Tyre', a city of great commercial fame, on the Mediterranean coast, close to Israel, its inhabitants, being traders, of peaceful tendencies, entered into no animosity against Israel. Its king 'Hiram', used to admire and love the person of David, the prophet and king; and, according to some, influenced by him, he came to worship the living God, and to forsake idol-worship. And when David died, he sent a delegation of princes and great rulers to pay condolence to his son

Solomon, to congratulate him for being enthroned as the new king, and to renew their covenant with him. His intention was to live in peace and love with the kings of Israel.

“Now Solomon’s provisions for one day was thirty kors of fine flour, sixty kors of meal” (22)

‘Kor’, a measure like ‘homer’; was according to ‘Josephus’, equal to 86 English gallons; according to the Jewish Rabbis, was equal to 44 gallons, and to others, was equal to 67 gallons. Thirty kors were equal to 33 sacs of flour; and the 60 kors were equal to 66 sacs of meal; That quantity of flour was the provision to 10,000 persons in the royal household, the royal guards, the guests, etc.

“Ten fatted oxen, twenty oxen from the pastures, and one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl” (23)

“For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from the Tiphseh even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him” (24)

‘Tiphseh’, a Hebrew word, means (a swamp land), a town at the extreme end of Solomon’s possessions toward the Euphrates; is ‘Theptex’, located on the western bank of the Euphrates, one of the most important passages in the middle part of the Euphrates; nowadays known as ‘Debsah’.

“And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon” (25)

They did not have to dwell in fortified cities, for fear of the attacks of enemies; but they were spread all over the place, feeding upon the fruit of their own labor. This expression used to refer to the peaceful way of life (2 kings 18: 31); and was

often used by the prophets as a symbol of the prosperity of the Messianic era (Micah 4: 4; Zechariah 3: 10).

“Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twenty thousand horsemen” (16)

Two or three horses used to feed from one stall. The Jewish kings, however, were forbidden by God to have a multitude of horses (Deuteronomy 17:16). According to some the figure 40,000 was wrongly quoted, and the right one was only 4,000.

“And these governors, each man in his month, provided food for king Solomon and for all who came to

king Solomon's table. There was no lack in their supply”
(27)

“They also brought barley and straw to the proper place, for the horses and steeds, each man according to his charge” (28)

Barley mixed with straw are still the main food for the horses in the Middle East.

3- SOLOMON'S EXALTED FAME: (28 – 34)

“And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore” (29)

The secret of Solomon's glory was the wisdom he received as a gift from God, more so than the riches, he experienced, to say: *“For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (6)*. And in the book of 'Job', it came: *“Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding to the heart?” (Job 38: 36)*.

According to some, *“the largeness of heart”* refers to the width of knowledge, as well as to the lack of any kind of anguish; In everything he acts with courage and daring, with no fear. He used to receive everything from God with joy and pleasure; and his heart never suffered anxiety before any event or any man. The psalmist says: *“I will run in the way of Your commandments; for You shall enlarge my heart”* (Psalm 119: 32). He likens the largeness of heart to the sand of the seashore, as far as the multitude of wisdom and knowledge.

“Thus Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt” (30)

By “men of the East”, he means the Arab tribes in the regions East of Canaan, up to the River Euphrates (Judges 6: 3; 7: 12; 8: 10; Job 1: 3; Isaiah 11: 15). And also the Chaldeans, who used to boast their knowledge in Astronomy and Astrology. And the Egyptians who were indisputably famous (Isaiah 19: 11; 31: 2; Acts 7: 22) in several branches of knowledge like architect, astrology, astronomy, sculpture, etc. beside their exceptional knowledge of botanical medicine.

“For he was wiser than all men – than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations” (31)

Those persons, probably contemporaries of Solomon, were famous for their wisdom, beside being musicians and composers of songs, in which Solomon has been superior to all of them.

‘Ethan the Ezrahite’: ‘Ethan’, a Hebrew word, means (holding fast) (1 Chronicles 6: 44). He was the composer of psalm 89.

‘Heman’, a Hebrew word, means (honest) (1 Chronicles 15: 17-19); he was the composer of psalm 88.

'Calcol', a Hebrew word, means (short and swift).

'Darda' or 'Dareh', a Hebrew word, probably means (thorns).

'Mahol', a Hebrew word, means (dancing), was the father of the later mentioned three, They were all wise men of the 'Zareh's' family, of the tribe of 'Judah'.

"He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five" (32)

Among those proverbs we have what came in the book of proverbs; and among the songs, beside the book of the Song of songs, we have the two psalms 72 and 127.

According to St. Hyppolytus of Rome, the Song of songs is not considered among the one thousand and five songs of Solomon.. In his proverbs and songs, Solomon wrote about plants, animals, air, sea, and the healing of ailments; The church, however, through an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, chose from among them what is for the healing of the soul, lest the people would be preoccupied with the healing of their bodies, and disregard what is for their spiritual healing.

"And he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon, even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish" (33)

The wise men of the old used to have interest in plants for the sake of their medicinal benefits.

The Jews used to divide the animal kingdom into four categories: Land animals, Birds, Reptiles, and Fish. And it was claimed that Solomon could talk with animals in their own languages.

Solomon could be considered as the first scientist of Nature and Physics in the world; And it is a great loss to lose all his personal works. Solomon, thus, beside being a king, has been a just judge, wise man, poet, musician, philosopher, a scientist of nature, and an author.

“And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (34)

Beside the wisdom and knowledge granted to him by God, Solomon had success in his political work, that his empire got well-established, and his era was characterized by peace with the surrounding nations. He was, as well, so talented in literature, and in music, that he wrote proverbs, and composed songs which he, himself played; to become of exalted world fame in every field of knowledge.

Solomon's kingdom, as is obvious from this chapter, refers to the kingdom of the Lord Christ, according to the following aspects:

- * Extending from the River to the Sea (Psalm 72: 8-11), it refers to the kingdom of the Lord Christ that extends from one corner of the universe to the other; having received the nations as His inheritance, and before whom kings and princes worship (Isaiah 49: 6-7; 53: 12).

- * His kingdom was characterized by peace and security.

- * Whoever gets attached to the king, will eat, drink, and rejoice (20); a joyful kingdom that fulfills the souls of believers.

- * A glorious kingdom, blessed by all around it.

- * The Fountain of every wisdom, and the source of every perfection.

* According to what came in chapter 10, the queen of Sheba was among those who came to hear Solomon's wisdom, and probably the greatest of them all. We actually marvel at all those great and commoners, who came from all over the world, to listen to someone reputed for his wisdom, something that we rarely see nowadays, and if we ever do, it would not be in such an amazing way. It is obvious that all of them came, not for the sake of curiosity, but for their own edification.

* Solomon, here, appears as a symbol of the Lord Christ, in whom hide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, for our edification; as according to the apostle Paul: *"He came to be wisdom for us"*.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 4

GRANT ME THE SPIRIT OF ORDINANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

+ Let me acquire You, O Wisdom of God, to become by You a wise man;
Together with Solomon, grant me the spirit of ordinance;
So that, by Your Spirit, I would walk with the spirit of order and not of confusion.

+ By Your Spirit I would enjoy an inner peace;
To have harmony between the soul and all its energies and capabilities;
To have harmony between the mind, the emotion, and the feeling;
In me, Your Spirit would set well-disciplined inner leadership;

+ You granted Solomon wisdom, good ordinance, and a talent of poetry;
Open up my mouth, to utter heavenly proverbs;

Let Your Holy Spirit play on the strings of my heart;
To sing, together with Solomon, one thousand and five songs;
Let my practical behavior be in harmony with my holy words in You;
Let my words be in harmony with the exultation of my heart for You;
For You are the Grantor of wisdom; the Giver of praise and joy.

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SOLOMON'S WORKS AND ACTIVITIES

(Chapters 5 to 9)

CHAPTER 5

PREPARATIONS FOR BUILDING THE TEMPLE

The most important task for Solomon the Sage, was building the temple of God, that his father David desired, but was not allowed to do; yet got a divine promise that it will be done by his son from his own seed. Having been granted the wisdom, together with riches, Solomon got to start the job. His father has already set for him the gold and the silver, as well as the proper political atmosphere, it remained for Solomon to bring forth the wood, the stones, and the workmanship, which necessitated for him to enter into a covenant with king Hiram of Tyre to realize.

Solomon was a symbol of the Lord Christ, about whom it was written: *“Behold the Man whose name is the BRANCH. From His place He shall branch out; and He shall build the temple of the Lord. Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on the throne. So He shall be a priest on His throne”* (Zechariah 6: 12, 13)

- 1- A congratulation message from Hiram the king of Tyre¹
- 2- A debate with king Hiram 2 - 6
- 3- A treaty with king Hiram 7 - 9
- 4- How the work ran its course 10 -18

1- A CONGRATULATION MESSAGE FROM THE KING OF TYRE: (1)

“Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, because he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram has always loved David” (1)

According to the Historian Josephus, all the correspondences between Hiram and Solomon were kept in the archives in the city of Tyre, up to his days. Tyre has been a city of commercial fame, on the border of Israel; Its inhabitants, being traders, had a tendency toward peace, and never entered into animosity against Israel. Its king Hiram always loved king David, admired his personality; and, according to some, through the influence of David, he even came to worship the living God, and had forsaken the idol-worship.

Having heard of the death of king David, Hiram sent a delegation of princes and great rulers of his state to present condolence to Solomon, to congratulate him on being enthroned in his father’s place, and to renew the covenant with him. His steady tendency was to live in peace with the king of Israel.

According to some, Hiram, mentioned here, was most probably the son of Hiram, the friend of David, mentioned in 2 Samuel 5: 11; who sent to him cedar wood, carpenters and builders to help building his own house; at the beginning of his reign.

Solomon, the great in his kingdom, presents to us a role model of how man should deal with love and respect with those less than him. He did not abuse his greater status in his debate with the king of Tyre; and did not despise him, but dealt with him with every reverence as an equal; And, with the spirit of humility, he sought his support, as though he was in need of the vast experience of his people.

2- A DEBATE WITH KING HIRAM: (2 – 6)

“Then Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, ‘You know how my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God, because of the wars which were fought against him on every side, until the Lord put his foes under the soles of his feet” (2, 3)

By saying that his father David could not build the temple, it is obvious how David was so preoccupied with that issue; that he must have discussed it with king Hiram; and must have told him that God did not allow him to build it, because he was a man of war; although he fought through a permission of God, and to the account of His people; which all conform with what came in 1 Chronicles 12: 4. As such a huge task needed a complete dedication; and as David had neither the time nor the concentration to consummate it, and as his kingdom was not yet well-established, God denied him the permission to do it.

“And now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrence” (4)

The Hebrew word for “adversary” is ‘saataan’, namely, ‘Satan’; It is as though God has given him rest from the outer enemy, as well as from the inner one, in order to dedicate himself to the task of building His temple.

The way Solomon, the man of peace, came to dedicate his time, possibilities, capabilities, and wisdom, for such a task; We, as well, should not cease to pray to God to grant us the peace, as a chance to dedicate our energies to build the temple of the Lord in every heart; as the controversies inside the church often deny us the proper dedication for the positive building.

“And behold, I propose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spoke to my father David, saying, ‘Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build a house for My name” (5)

According to the scholar origin, ‘Solomon’, whose name means peace, is a symbol of the Lord Christ; he built the temple after the wars came to an end, and peace prevailed for sometime. The prophecy that the temple is to be built by Christ was realized, saying, *“I am for peace; But when I speak, they are for war”* (Psalm 120: 7); He sets His temple on a foundation of living stones; each of us has his own place in the living building.

- * Solomon used the most precious building materials most of which were imported, like the cedar from Lebanon (6); the large squarely hewn stones were cut by Solomon’s, Hiram’s and mountain laborers (15-18); olive tree wood (6: 20-22); cypress wood (6: 34); pure gold (6: 22); and bronze (7: 13-47).
- * Hiram king of Tyre sent to Solomon building material and laborers (5: 16; 9: 11); And Solomon presented to him 20 cities ((9: 11).

- * There were 30,000 men to cut wood; 150,000 to cut stones; and 3300 foremen.
- * The whole temple was overlaid with gold (6: 22)
- * All the walls of the temple were carved all around (on the inside and the outside), with figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers (6: 29).
- * Solomon did not determine the weight of the bronze articles, because they were so many (7: 47).
- * It took them seven years to finish the work (38; 6: 37)

Although Solomon had the intention to give the best he had for the glory of God; but God confirmed to him that He was only preoccupied with the inner building of the soul, by obeying the commandment (6: 11-12); and that He intends to dwell, not in a house made by men, as much as He intends to dwell in men themselves, and to receive what they offer Him (8: 27; 1 Corinthians 6: 19, 20).

“Now therefore, command that they cut down cedars for me from Lebanon; and my servants will be with your servants; and I will pay you wages for your servants according to whatever you say. For you know there is none among us who has skill to cut timber like the Sidonians” (6)

Cedar trees have special importance for the beauty of their wood, beside its intense bitterness that slows its corruption by insects and worms.

The Hebrew word translated as ‘cedar’, seems to refer, not only to cedar trees, but to several other kinds of trees whose wood is used for building.

The Holy Book talks about the cedar of Lebanon in particular, being “planted by God”, to be used in building His temple.

Solomon sought from king Hiram the use of the experience of his people in cutting the cedar trees and transporting them by sea.

While the people of Israel had their own experience as far as worship and the holy life in the Lord; the Sidonians had their own experience in cutting cedar trees and transporting them by sea. Not disregarding their experience, Solomon, by his wisdom, knew how to make it work in harmony with the spiritual experience of his people. The successful leader knows how to direct all energies and talents, whether spiritual or temporal, to work together in harmony to the account of the kingdom of God.

“And I will pay you wages for your servants according to whatever you say”. The temple of the Lord will not be built with the spirit of oppression; What is for the Lord would not be built without the thought of the Lord who cares for the needy laborers. How many would be offended to see some leaders of the church abuse their authority on others in the congregation, even for some tasks to the account of the church!

The name of the Lord dwells on, and in the temple; which is the proclamation of His nature in a seen way, expressing His divine presence.

The “Sidonians” refer to the Phoenicians in general, on account of that ‘Sidon’ has been greater than Tyre; it included the region abundant in Cedar trees; and its inhabitants were highly experienced in building and arts in general. It seems that the Sidonians had their own king, yet under ‘Tyre’.

The use of the Sidonians – foreign to Israel – in cutting the wood and stones for building the temple, was a symbol of the participation of church leaders from the Gentiles in building the eternal spiritual house of the Lord.

As the work was too huge for the Phoenicians to do alone, there was a need for laborers from Israel to take part in it. According to the Jewish Historian Josephus: This task of preparing the wood and stones to be used in building the temple, needed specific expertise which the Israeli lacked, among which are:

- * Deciding the best time for cutting the trees, which is during fall or winter, when the stem does not include a high ratio of humidity.
- * Cutting the tree is not done all at once, but it starts by cutting slightly all around the stem; left a while to dry; then utterly cut.
- * The wood, before being used for building, flooring, and window-making, should be left to dry for three years. It was therefore, befitting for the success of such a great task, not to do it with undue haste, lest it ends up with failure.

The old historians testify to the craftsmanship of the Sidonians, say that the large cups used by the Greeks to drink wine, were made in 'Sidon'; So were the beautiful embroidered garments boasted by the rich and prominent Greek ladies. According to Herodot, the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidons were ahead in navigation, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, etc.

3- A TREATY WITH KING HIRAM: (7 – 9)

“So it was, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly and said, ‘blessed be the Lord this day, for he has given David a wise son over this great people’ (7)

Being a religious man, Hiram rejoiced to hear Solomon's suggestion to let him contribute in such a great task in some way. He rejoiced to see such a wise son of his good friend David (Malachi 2: 15). For, by love, no envy nor jealousy entered his heart. Besides, it was for his own benefit to have good relationships

with Israel, for the sake of a prosperous trade, for which the Phoenicians were known.

Hiram's reaction to Solomon's message, may give the impression that he worshipped the true God; Yet, according to some, the glorification of Hiram to the God of Israel, did not mean that he was not an idol-worshipper; but it was a confession that He was a true God among many other true gods. In 2 Chronicles 2: 11, Hiram confesses that Jehovah is the Creator of heaven and earth; Yet that did not mean that he entered into personal relationship with Him; For it was a common custom of the pagans, believing that every nation has its own god to worship; it is befitting for everyone to respect gods of the others.

“Then Hiram sent to Solomon saying, ‘I have considered the message which you sent me, and I will do all you desire considering the cedar and the cypress logs’” (8)

Although the Lebanese forests in the days of Solomon were in the possession of the Phoenicians, yet, according to some scholars, the cedar trees mentioned here were in the land of Israel; and the need was for the expertise and craftsmanship to cut and prepare them for the building.

“My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon to the sea. I will float them in rafts by sea to the place you indicate to me, and will have them broken apart there; then you can take them away. And you shall fulfill my desire by giving food for my household” (9)

Hiram's men not only cut the trees in the proper way, but had the experience to float them in rafts by sea to 'Joppa' which is only about 25 miles away from Jerusalem.

4- HOW THE WORK RAN ITS COURSE: (10-18)

So Hiram gave Solomon cedar and cypress logs according to all his desire; and Solomon gave Hiram 20,000 kors of wheat as food for his household; and 20 kors of pressed oil. Thus Solomon gave to Hiram year by year”
(10-11)

The Israelites were in need of the craftsmanship of the Sidonians, who, on their side, were in need of wheat and pressed oil of the Israelites (Ezekiel 27: 17; 2 Chronicles 2: 3). No man is self-dependent; but is in need of his brother; And every nation is in need of the other nations.

The pressed oil, produced from olives by pressure, is pure of any debris, unlike that produced by grinding.

Here we find the two parties: Solomon and Hiram, execute their role in the treaty as they should:

- * Hiram gave Solomon the wood; although the wages given to the experienced labor exceeded the actual price of the trees.
- * Solomon gave Hiram wheat and pressed oil, as promised (11) for his household; although the laborers ate at the location of work.

*“So the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as He had promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon,
and the two of them made treaty together” (12)*

God gave Solomon wisdom and grace to make friendship with Hiram; who loved Solomon and the two of them were encouraged to keep their relationship sound and pure of anything that might corrupt it. Such a relationship was done through

straightforward behavior and absence of any kind of abuse; realized by the intervention of God who granted wisdom to Solomon.

According to the Jewish Historian Josephus, the documents of the treaty between Solomon and Hiram was found in the archives of both Israel and Tyre; with no need of translation; as it was the common belief that the Canaanites were speaking the Hebrew tongue, or at least some version close to it.

Solomon showed wisdom , not only in his foreign policy, but in using the energies of his own people, as well.

“Then king Solomon raised up a labor force out of all Israel, and the labor force was 30,000 men. And he sent them to Lebanon 10,000 a month in shifts; they were one month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of the labor force” (13-14)

There is a great difference between the way the Canaanites captives were committed as forced labor (15; 9: 20), and that of the Israelites as free labor force; who were committed to work only four months in the whole year: one month in Lebanon and two months at home.

Although Solomon's heart was burning with zeal to finish building the house of the Lord, yet he was keen from the beginning not to burden the laborers beyond reason, for fear that they might lose their inner peace and their physical drive. According to some, Solomon, caring for the unity of their families, did not allow any laborer to be away from his family longer than one month, after which he had to spend two months with them.

Following that system with the Israelite labor force, was not counted as forced labor nor as servitude; for Solomon was keen to let his people live in freedom,

and looked at the children of Israel as “*men of war, his servants, his officers, his captains, commanders of his chariots, and his cavalry*” (9: 22)

When Sisostris Pharaoh of Egypt came back from his many wars, he built several temples all over Egypt, all by the hands of the captives of war; that he engraved on every temple a sign saying, ‘No citizen took part in building this temple’. And it so seems that is what Solomon likewise did.

The prophecy of the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7: 13), that Solomon will build the temple, has been realized.

The building started by cooperation between the two kingdom: Israel and Phoenicia; each of which did her part in keeping the covenant or the treaty they agreed on.

According to some, the great burden, both on the financial side and that of the forced labor, led to some degree of resentment by some of the tribes against Judah, and probably against the temple itself; that encouraged ‘Jeroboam’ later on to set two temples at ~~xxxxxx~~ and Dan.

While Solomon had to use a system of forced labor to build the temple; Our Christ, on the other hand, calls on the slaves to enjoy freedom, to set out of them His heavenly temple. Concerning this the scholar Origen says:

- + In case I belong to the church, I shall not be preoccupied with my hummle status; for my angel freely beholds the face of God the father; which he would not dare to do if I do not belong to her.
- + About the heavenly Jerusalem, the apostle Paul says: “She is free; the mother of us all” (Galatians 4: 26). Your Father, therefore, is God, He who has begotten your soul; and He who says: “*I have nourished, and brought*

up children” (Isaiah 1: 2); Whereas Paul says: “Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” (Hebrew 12: 9)

(The scholar Origen)

Solomon had seventy thousand who carried burdens, and eighty thousand who quarried stone in the mountains” (15)

To his own men, Solomon allotted the easier task, namely cutting the wood, with the help of experts from Tyre and Sidon; whereas the harder task of carrying burdens and quarrying stone in the mountains, he left to the captives from other nations (1 Kings 9: 20; 2 Chronicles 8: 7-9); whose number in the days of David reached 153600; and who, being captives, have not enjoyed the system of working one month and having rest two months like the Israelites.

Some fathers, like St. Jerome, see in the workers in building the temple, a symbolic portrait of work in the living church of God.

- + The 70,000 men who carried burdens, refer to all men of the old covenant, who had the heavenly mind: The figure 7 refers to time (a week), the figure 10 refers to temporal perfection; and the figure 1000 refers to the spiritual or heavenly thought.
- + The 80,000 men who quarried stone in the mountain, refer to all men of the new covenant, who have the heavenly mind: the figure 8 refers to what is beyond the time (past a week); the figure 10 refers to temporal perfection; and the figure 1000 refers to the spiritual or heavenly thought.
- + As to the 3300 men who supervised the people who labored in the work (16), the figure 3 refers to all those who believe in the work of the Holy

Trinity in their life (3); and the figure 1000 to the spiritual or heavenly thought.

The true temple of the Lord extends in the two covenants, as the fruit of the work of the Holy Trinity in the life of believers.

- + The 70,000 who quarried stone in the mountains; and those who carried the burdens from the earth for the foundation of the building, refer to the prophets and fathers (patriarchs) who seem to draw the human race from the earth to establish the temple of the Lord. As to the 80,000, they symbolize the apostolic and gospels preachers, those who, together with the Lord Savior, and with Solomon himself, carries the heavy burden of the nations. ... That is concerning the height of the secret; but let us listen to its depth.... The 3000 supervisors would not be able to perform, unless they proclaim the trinity.

(St. Jerome)

“Beside three thousand three hundred from the chiefs of Solomon’s deputies, who supervised the people who labored in the work. And the king commanded them to quarry large stones, costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the temple” (17)

“The large stones”, concerning their huge dimensions.

“the costly stones”, concerning the expense of hard labor and long time required to cut them from the mountain.

“The hewn stones”, concerning the hard labor and long time required to make them square and smooth; by the Israeli workers together with those from Tyre.

*“So Solomon’s builders, Hiram’s builders, and the Gebalites
quarried them, and they prepared timber and stones
to build the temple” (18)*

In Ezekiel 27: 9, it came that the ‘Gebalites’ were experienced in building in general, and in ship building in particular. They were inhabitants of ‘Gebal’ on the sea coast, about 25 miles from Beirut, on the way to Tripoli, Lebanon (Joshua 13: 5 Ezekiel 27: 9).

As long as David and Solomon walked in a godly spirit, their relationship with the people of Tyre has been of great benefit; But once Solomon deflected from piety, that relationship turned to harm, which reached its climax in the days of Ahab who took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians (16: 31).

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 5

LET ME DEDICATE ALL MY ENERGIES TO BUILD YOUR HOUSE

+ Put in my heart to build a house for You together with Solomon the Sage;
Solomon managed to get Hiram’s men, king of Tyre, to work to the
account of Your house;

Let me dedicate all my energies, and of those whom I encounter;
That the whole world would work to build Your true house!
Let the heart of every man rejoice in building Your kingdom;
As the heart of Hiram rejoiced in joining Solomon in building Your temple.

+ Solomon forced 30,000 from Israel to work together with the captives and
men from Tyre,
Everyone of them had his role in building Your temple;

When shall I see the whole world serving to the account of Your kingdom?
When will all energies be dedicated by Your Holy Spirit?

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CHAPTER 6

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

This chapter tells us details about the Solomon's temple, or the new house of the Lord, in which we see:

- * Speaking about the temple of His body, the Grantor of resurrection, *"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'. Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days? but He was speaking of the temple of His body"* (John 2: 19-20). God the Father *"prepared a body for Him"* (Hebrew 10: 5).
- * The Lord Christ established His church a holy temple for Himself. *"Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit"* (Ephesians 2: 20-22)
- * Out of every believer He made a temple where the Spirit of God dwells: *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3: 16). Every believer sees in his body united with his soul by the Spirit of God, a holy temple. *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are of your own?"* (1 Corinthians 6: 19). Set upon the cornerstone, the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ, and its building, and the perfection of its beauty, are consummated on the great day of the

Lord. And the way Solomon adorned the temple with gold and precious stones, the Spirit of God does not cease to adorn us with His exalted gifts and rich grace; to make us carry the glory of God in us, and be qualified for the fellowship of the eternal glory.

- * Our heavenly life, as well, and dwelling eternally with God, are called 'the heavenly temple'; for there, we see God in His exalted glory, surrounded by the heavenly hosts unceasingly praising Him; a temple not made by human hand, and in it no sound of an iron tool is heard, but only unceasing exultations.

Solomon built the temple of the Lord which is difficult to know its exact cost, in particular the incredible quantities of gold to make several of its tools, and to cover the inside of the whole building, even the flooring. Yet that was not for the sake of the glory of Solomon, but for that of God; contrary to what the pharaohs of Egypt did when they built the pyramids, one of which needed 360,000 laborers for a period of twenty years; for the sake of the glory of the king.

According to the scholar Origen, building the temple bears a symbol for setting the temple of God, in which the Lord Christ is the cornerstone, and the believers of men of both the old and the new covenants were the living stones set on His Person. Here is a quick look at what the Scholar Origen saw in the building of the temple:

- * No sound of engraving was heard; as it is befitting of the believer, to become a living stone in the building of the Lord, not to have inside him any disturbing sound.
- * The use of gold in the temple refers to the tranquility and perfection of the believer's mind, who elaborately and wisely perceive things.

- * The existence of a veil in it refers to that certain things in the depths of the temple (the most Holy place'), are not to be revealed to most of the priests and Levites.
- * The temple was built by Solomon; And all the bronze tools were made by 'Hiram' the son of a widow in Tyre, and his father of high wisdom and understanding in the craftsmanship of bronze. The former refers to the work of the Lord Christ, the Firstfruit of all creation; and the later refers to someone with wisdom and understanding. The temple, therefore is the fruit of God's work in and with us.

Building the temple in the promised land, where all the people gather together around it during the major feasts, is considered an important historical event in the history of the children of Israel; probably not less important than their exodus on the hand of the prophet Moses. If the exodus was liberation from the servitude of Pharaoh, as a symbol of the liberation from the servitude of the devil, and of the enjoyment of the eternal inheritance; Building the divine temple in the midst of the people, refers to the dwelling of God in their midst, or His descending to them to embrace them with love. The inheritance they have got (the promised land), in essence, is an encounter and dwelling with the Holy One.

The building was characterized by the following:

- * The dimensions and form of the building bear spiritual symbols that touch the believer's life and fellowship with God
- * The choice of specific valuable kinds of wood.
- * Use of an abundance of pure gold and silver.
- * The building, and particularly the 'the most holy place', was richly adorned.

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1- START OF THE BUILDING: (1)

“And it came to pass in the four hundred and eighteenth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord” (1)

The building started in the four hundred and eighteenth year after the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, including:

40 years in the wilderness with the prophet Moses

17 years with Joshua

299 years with the judges

40 years with Eli the priest

40 years with Samuel (under king Saul)

40 years under king David

The first 4 years under the reign of Solomon

Total 480 years.

The starting date was fixed by the exodus of the children from the land of Egypt; for the goal of the exodus was to set forth from the land of servitude to the promised land; which was realized with the presence of God among His people, and leading them by Himself. Now, building the house, proclaims the possibility of the true freedom, by the dwelling of the Grantor of freedom among them.

The temple was built after 480 years from their exodus from the land of servitude to enjoy the holy life, the shadow of heaven. Then the temple was burnt down after 430 years by Nebuchadnezzar, when the people got back to servitude by the Babylonian captivity. The presence of the house, therefore, was a sign of the longing of God toward the liberation of His people and His believers.

Building the temple started on the second month; as though starting by the spirit of the perfect love as a spiritual foundation of the house. As the figure 2 refers to the perfection of love, when the two become one; ... The divine commandment of love came in two integral parts: the love of God and the love of the neighbor (See Mark 12: 30-31); ... The widow offered her perfect love together with two mites (See Mark 12: 42); ... The good Samaritan offered his perfect love together with two denarii (Luke 10: 35); ... And the Holy Book proclaims love as its essence, in the two testaments, the old and the new.

The month of 'Ziv', meaning (splendor) or (exultation), probably because that month which corresponds to a part of the month of April, and a part of the month of May, during which the beautiful flowers appear to pour splendor on the earth. Whereas after the captivity, its name became 'Jyar'. It so seems that the Jews did not call their months by names, but by numbers.

The foundations of the temple were laid the year 2992 of creation, or 1008 B.C.; and the work ended the year 3000 of creation, and was dedicated the year 3001, or the year 999 B.C.

The building of the temple rose high on Mount 'Moriah' in Jerusalem, on the threshing floor of 'Araunah' the Jebusite, where David built an altar for the Lord (2 Samuel 24: 18-25), after the land was paved, and all the pits in it were filled.

It was called 'the house of the Lord', on account of that it was God Himself who chose it, chose the man who was to build it, and laid its plans (1 Chronicles 28: 11-12). And on another aspect, the building was dedicated to the worship of God, never to be used, nor its tools to be used for any other purpose.

It was called 'the house of the Lord', on account of that it was a shadow of the things to come (see Hebrews 9: 9). All what preoccupied the Lord was that His house be holy, as the place where the Holy One encounters His saints. The tabernacle of David – despite its simplicity -- was called 'the house of the Lord' (2 Samuel 12: 20); for the sake of its dedication to the Lord, and the holiness of David's heart. The glory of the Lord, however forsook the temple -- despite its magnificence and greatness – when the people, together with the priests persisted on corruption (Ezekiel 10: 18).

Solomon did not start building the temple before the second month of the fourth year of his reign, after he established his kingdom, so as not to be preoccupied with any other issue. Those three years would be added to the years his father David spent preparing for starting the building.

2- ITS DIMENSIONS AND FEATURES: (2 -10)

- **Its dimension:**

"Now the house which king Solomon built for the Lord, its length was 60 cubits, its width 20, and its height 30 cubits" (2)

According to some, the dimensions here are about double as much as those of the tabernacle of the meeting; on account of that the number of the people increased, and there was need for enlarging the place of worship, *“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”* (Isaiah 54: 2).

The size of the temple depends upon our perception of the actual length of the old cubit compared to the modern one, which is not fully settled. According to some it was between 19 and 20 inches, called the ‘holy cubit’ (Ezekiel 40: 5; 43: 13); about the length of a human arm, a little longer than the modern cubit.

*** The vestibule:**

“The vestibule in front of the sanctuary of the house was 20 cubits long across the breadth of the house, and its width extended ten cubits from the front of the house” (3)

The vestibule which extended in front of the building of the temple, as an adornment added to the huge building, its height was 4 times that of the building itself, and the scenery from its top was fantastic, revealing the Mediterranean Sea on one side, and the Dead Sea on the other, across the river Jordan, and beyond Arabia. Beside its entrance, there was a court with pillars that extended in the days of Solomon’s successors on all sides.

• The windows:

“and he made for the house windows with beveled frames” (4)

The windows were wide from the inside, and narrow on the outside, like in the ancient Egyptian buildings and the old monasteries, with their huge walls; to

facilitate the entrance of air and light, and the exit of incense and the smoke, produced by the oil lamps Those windows refer to the inner insight; as it is befitting of us to have a wider insight than an outer look; to care for the perception of our own inner depths, more than to be preoccupied with others; and to judge ourselves instead of criticizing the others.

Through those windows, those inside could look easily, while those outside could not see what is going on inside. In the Tergom it so came that those windows could be opened on the inside and closed shut on the outside.

- **The chambers:**

“Against the wall of the temple he built chambers all around, against the walls of the temple, all around both the sanctuary and the inner sanctuary. Thus he made side chambers all around it” (5)

Building chambers all around the walls of the house refer to the practical care for providing proper places where the accessories of the temple could be befittingly placed; and providing places where priests could put on, take off, and store their priestly attires. Together with the beauty of the building, there should also be care for its practical use, to fulfill the goal of building it to the maximum.

Here, there is no mention of the number of chambers; In the temple mentioned in the vision seen by the prophet Ezekiel, the number of its chambers were thirty (Ezekiel 41: 6), which, according to Jewish authors correspond to their number in the temple built by Solomon.

Chambers were on three sides of the temple, in the following way:

“The lower chamber was five cubits wide, the middle was six cubits wide, and the third was seven cubits wide; for

he made narrow ledges around the outside of the temple, so that the support beams would not be fastened into the walls of the temple. And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stones finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built" (6 – 7)

The walls were built by stones brought forth from the quarries known up to this day as 'Solomon's quarries', where they were completely finished before transferring them to the building site, There, would be no need for using any iron tool, like hammer or chisel, as the stones and the wood would be ready to put in place in a tranquil and peaceful atmosphere; for any undue noise would distract the worshippers and deny them the proper encounter with God, and His dwelling inside them.

The use of iron tools like hammers and chisels refer to the impact of conflicts among the believers, that would destroy the edification of the church, the house of God. Symbolizing the kingdom of God, namely heaven itself, we should be utterly prepared in the house of the Lord, to become living stones fit for the heavenly building. There, no sound of any iron tool would be heard: no repentance, nor cry-outs of temptations; but only of joy and exultant hearts.

- + God intends for that hammer, meant for the whole earth, to be understood as being 'the devil'; By that hammer in the hand of the Lord, the holy souls are struck, to produce an echo of praises to God.... By that hammer, both the righteous and the sinner, are struck: the former as a temptation, and the latter as punishment; or at least, for the righteous to increase in virtue, and for the sinner to correct his ways. By such a hammer in the hand of the Lord, not only the humble are struck, but the proud as well. Yet the humble would be struck like gold; whereas the proud would be broken as

glass. The same stroke would make the good in glory; and would turn the proud into chaff, *"which the wind drives away"* (Psalm 1: 4).

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + Let the door of your mouth, and that of your heart, be very carefully closed before the enemy, lest he would quickly and violently opens them and enters if he finds it possible. The Lord Christ, on the other hand, would knock on the door (Song 5: 3; Luke 12: 36), and not break it down; *"He has strengthened the bars of your gates, O Jerusalem"* (Psalm 147: 13); and would knock on the door to let you open it for him, whereas the enemy would break it down with axe and hammer; Hence it is written: *"no hammer or chisel are to be brought into the house of the Lord"* (6-7); Let pride and deception be outside and not inside its doors; *"Let conflicts be outside"* (2 Corinthians 7: 5); but only peace *"which surpasses all understanding"* (Philippians 4: 7) be inside. I wish your souls not be cut by iron, lest they would be like the soul of Joseph, that *"was laid in iron"* (Psalm 105: 18); lest the part that controls your soul (the tabernacle of the Word), would be destroyed, at the beginning of faith, and the start of spiritual learning.

(St.

Ambrose)

In his ninth sermon on the book of Joshua, the scholar Origen, talking about the temple of God, where Jesus Christ can offer His sacrifice to the Father; he says that it is built of perfect, unbroken stones, on which no iron tool was used (see Deuteronomy 27: 5); Those are the living pure

stones – the saintly apostles – who form an integral temple through the unity of their hearts (Acts 1: 24), souls and minds, and “*continuing with one accord in prayers and supplications*” (Acts 1: 14); Namely, had the true unity, founded upon the holy life, love (the unity of hearts), the fellowship of worship (one voice), and one faith (one mind).

According to Origen, the sanctification of every member is the foundation of the unity of the church, as what one member commits would affect the others; One sinner who commit adultery or any other crime, would corrupt the whole congregation.

“The doorway for the middle story was on the right side of the temple. They went up by stairs to the middle story, and from the middle to the third” (8)

There was one single entrance to the side chambers of the priests.

“So he built the temple and finished it, and he paneled the temple with beams and boards of cedar” (9)

In the West, they build the roof out of ceramic or plaster; Whereas in the East, they build it of wood. Although in the old European buildings they followed the eastern way, as proved in the Westminster Hall in London.

“And he built side chambers against the entire temple, each five cubits high; they were attached to the temple with cedar beams” (10)

3- THE DIVINE PROMISE: (11 – 14)

While being preoccupied with building the temple of the Lord with his whole energies and heart, the Lord spoke to him to encourage him, and to confirm to him that He will dwell among His people and will never forsake them, if they are faithful in keeping His commandment to them.

We cannot present a complete portrait of what went on around Solomon, and within his own heart; more than to confirm that he, and a multitude of others, have been exultant in spirit. The work undoubtedly needed long time, effort, labor, and high expenses by Solomon and his men; Hence the Word of the Lord came to encourage them.

On another aspect, God intended to confirm that building the inner temple of the Lord inside the souls by keeping His statutes, was, to Him, more important than the stone buildings.

The Word of God came to Solomon, before he start the work, during it, and when it came to an end. God intends to begin with us, walk along with us, and makes us reach the end of the way; He longs to accompany us from the beginning up to the end; For He is the First and the Last; the Beginning and the End.

“Then the word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying: ‘Concerning this temple you are building; if you walk in

My statutes, execute My judgments, keep all My commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform My word with you, which I spoke to your father David” (11, 12)

No construction company would be able to start building a (skyscraper) unless after it receives the plans of construction from the architect concerned. God is the divine Architect who plans the building of His temple in the soul, and provides us with the plans to execute; namely, to walk in His statutes, to work according to

His judgments, and to keep His commandments, through practical obedience to Him. By that the building would be set in us through the work of His Holy Spirit.

It was the idea of David the prophet and king, to build a house for the Lord instead of the movable tabernacle of the meeting. He gathered together the money and jewels needed, and prepared the tools and equipments (2 Samuel 7; 1 Kings 5:3-5; 8: 17; 1 Chronicles 22; 28: 11-29). The Holy Book provides us with an elaborate census of the money and jewels set aside by David for that holy enterprise.

“And I will dwell among the children of Israel; and will not forsake My people Israel” (13)

That was fulfilled in a stronger and greater way by the coming of the Word of God Himself, and setting His temple in the hearts; and His dwelling in His church, and in the depths of His believers.

What God promises here, is a confirmation of what He has previously promised in 2 Samuel 12: 12. Setting the temple is the deposit of the divine presence among the people, and a confirmation of what God promised king David; and what came in the book of Leviticus 26: 11.

“So Solomon built the temple and finished it” (14)

4- THE INSIDE WALLS AND THE FLOOR: (15 – 18)

“And he built the inside walls of the temple with cedar boards, from the floor of the temple to the ceiling he paneled them on the inside with wood, and he covered the floor of the temple with planks of cypress” (15)

Inside the house, the stones of the walls were not visible, but were paneled from inside with wood, which was in turn covered with a layer of pure gold, that also paneled the floor.

The inside was divided into two sections by a veil with folding doors, opened, and closed by golden chains. The inside section – the most holy place -- was a cubicle – shaped, its sides 20 cubits (30 feet) long. And the front section – the sanctuary – was 40 cubits long. The wood of the floor was carved with ornamental buds and open flowers, the cherub, and palms. All was cedar, there was no stones to be seen.

“Then he built the twenty-cubit room at the rear of the temple, from to ceiling, with cedar boards; he built it inside

as the inner sanctuary, as the most holy place” (16)

“And in front of it the temple sanctuary was forty cubits long. The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with

ornamental buds and open flowers. All was cedar, there was no stone to be seen” 17, 18)

5- THE INNER SANCTUARY (THE MOST HOLY PLACE): (19 – 22)

“And he prepared the inner sanctuary inside the temple to set the ark of the covenant of the Lord there” (19)

The inner sanctuary, or the most holy place, or as what is meant by the Hebrew word, is (the place of talking), so called on account of that God used to talk to Moses through the chair of the throne above the ark of the covenant, or to the high priest when he puts on the breastplate and seeks His counsel.

Solomon renewed everything except the ark of the covenant with the two cherubs and the throne seat, for it represents the divine presence that never changes with time, but is realized with His people, whether through the tabernacle of the meeting or the temple of Solomon.

Because the inner sanctuary, or the most holy place in the temple, was very huge compared to that in the tabernacle of the meeting; and the ark of the covenant looked very small in the midst of that vast area, that was why the two huge cherubs were set from one wall to the other, beside many ornaments, so that the sanctuary would not look empty.

“The inner sanctuary as twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high. He overlaid it with

pure gold, and overlaid the altar with cedar. So Solomon overlaid the inside of the temple with pure gold.

He stretched gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, and he overlaid it with gold” (20-21)

It would be difficult to evaluate the gold that overlaid the whole building on the inside, beside the golden lampstand and the golden altar of incense, etc.

“The whole temple he overlaid with gold, until he has finished all the temple; also he overlaid with gold the entire

altar that was by the inner sanctuary” (22)

6- THE TWO CHERUBIM: (23-30)

“Inside the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. One wing of the cherub was five cubits, and the other wing of the cherub five cubits; ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other.

And the other cherub was ten cubits; both cherubim were of the same size and shape. The height of one cherub was ten cubits, and so was the other cherub. Then he set the cherubim inside the inner room; and they stretched out the wings of the cherubim, so that the wing of the one touched one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall. And their wings touched each other in the middle of the room. Also he overlaid the cherubim with gold” (23-28)

As the cover of the ark carried two cherubs, there were also two cherubs that filled the most holy place; the tip of the wing of each one touched on one side one wall, and the other touched the other the tip of the other wing. A reference to that the place was heavenly, representing the fellowship of the heavenlies. . The two cherubim were not looking at one another, but toward the ark; (and in 2 Chronicles 3: 13, toward the house). Despite the fellowship between the heavenlies, yet their minds are not preoccupied with one another, but with God, dwelling in His holy temple.

- + The angelic hosts join the congregation of believers, to where the power of our Lord and Savior dwells; and where the spirits of the saints who have departed, and those who are still living; although this is not easy to explain.

(The scholar Origen)

The cherubim:

The “cherub” is one of the important symbols in the Mosaic worship; appearing in the tabernacle of the meeting, then later on, on the walls of the

temple of Solomon, and in the vision of Ezekiel concerning the new temple. The cherubim is always connected to the tabernacle of God, the dwelling place of God among His people. Two cherubim of pure gold appear over the mercy seat, stretching out their wings above the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25: 17-22), referring to the divine glory; as according to the apostle Paul: *"above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat"* (Hebrew 9: 5).

With reference to the cherubim, they are not called 'angels', for they do not act as messengers from God to carry certain messages to men; but they appear to men in visions to proclaim God's glory, dominion, and holiness. By their appearance, they proclaim God's dwelling place and heavenly throne; namely, they represent the divine presence. It is referred to God as dwelling between the cherubim: *"You, who dwells between the cherubim, shine forth!"* (Psalm 80: 1); and *"The Lord reigns; Let the people tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved"* (Psalm 99: 1).

The name "cherubim" means (a flow of knowledge), or a flood of wisdom; Hence they refer to the power of knowledge, and to the vision of God. They meditate in the beauty of divinity in the first of its proclamations; fellows in the divine wisdom, generously flow with the fountain of their wisdom over those inferior to them.

It is amazing how the cherubim are closely connected to our salvation; How, in the first of the Holy Books, a cherub appeared holding *"a sword flaming and turning, to guard the way to the tree of life"* (Genesis 3: 24); as the fallen nature of man cannot approach the secret of life. And, in the last of the Holy Books, the cherubim appeared together with the heavenly twenty-four priests, partaking of the praise of the Lamb, the praise

of our salvation (Revelation 5: 9); as man had the right to enter into heaven itself, having his nature renewed in Jesus Christ, the true Lamb.

Between the first and the last of the holy books, two Cherubs also appear over the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle of the meeting and Solomon's temple, a sign of the divine presence; Through them, God talked to Moses. Their presence over the ark of the covenant, that represents the throne of God, refers to that God who dwells among His people, talks to them and deals with them through mercy and love. The presence of two of them refers to the role of the heavenlies toward us: praying for our sake, and ministering for those who will inherit salvation (Hebrew 1: 14). The shapes of cherub drawn on the curtains and veils of the tabernacle (Exodus 27-25), conforms to a human form, yet winged, to proclaim the closeness of the human nature to the divine presence.

Man knew about the cherubim, who became no stranger to humanity, the Chaldeans in particular; although the later added to it things on their own, as the other nations did to all the facts of faith, that they received orally, or through tradition, and mixed them with their distorted thoughts.

Seeing the cherubim, we recall our human nature that enjoyed the salvation through its unity with our Lord God in Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit.

Following the Jewish 'Felon', St. Clement of Alexandria says that the word "cherub" means (knowledge); Through the spiritual knowledge, our life would become a chariot that carries God inside it. This was also accepted by St. Jerome who saw in the cherub a symbol of the store of knowledge working in our nature to raise it and set forth with it among the heavenly hosts. Like a lion, it works in our nature that prevailed upon lusts; Like an eagle, it soars in the high things; Like an oxen it strives; and like a man it works with reason. This knowledge we take from

the four gospels; as according to the same saint: [Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John, are e quartet team of the Lord; the true cherubs, With their bodies full of eyes, twinkling like lightening, they are a store of knowledge; and with their feet, straight and high-up; and their winged back, they are ready to fly to all directions; each one of them holding the other, connected like wheels inside wheels, moving according to the breathes of the Holy Spirit.

“Then he carved all the walls of the temple all around, both the inner and outer sanctuaries with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers” (29)

The presence of the cherubim in the inner sanctuary, and carving them on all the walls of the house, is not intended for worshipping the heavenly hosts, but to confirm the fellowship of the heavenlies with the earthlies in worshipping the living God.

“And the floor of the temple he overlaid with gold, both the inner and the outer sanctuaries. For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood; the lintels and the doorposts were one-fifth of the wall” (30-31)

7- THE DOORS: (32-35)

“The two doors were of olive wood, and he carved on them figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold. And he spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees. So for the door of the sanctuary he also made doorposts of olive wood, one-fourth of the wall. The two doors were of cypress wood, two panels

comprised one folding door, and two panels comprised the other folding door. Then he carved cherubim, palm trees , and open flowers on them, and overlaid them with gold applied evenly on the carved works” (32-35)

According to the scholar Origen, the church is the door or righteousness, through which the Righteous Jesus Christ enters; And the doors of the church are located opposite to the doors of death.

- + Now, we can understand that the doors of Zion as opposite to the doors of death. There is therefore, one door of death and iniquity; whereas the door of Zion is that of self-control; which is meant by the words of the prophet, saying: *“This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter”* (Psalm 118: 20).

‘Cowardice’, as the door of death, whereas ‘courage’ is the door of Zion. ‘Lack of reason’ is the door of death; whereas ‘reason’ is the door of Zion. Contrary to all the doors of *“what is falsely called knowledge”* (1 Timothy 6: 20); there is one door of true knowledge.

But, if we take into consideration that *“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood”* (Ephesians 6: 12), we can say that all power of the *“rulers of the darkness of this age, and of the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6: 12), is the door of hell and death.

(The
scholar Origen)

The walls of the tabernacle of the meeting were of precious colored fabric, on which only cherubim were drawn. Whereas in the temple the walls

were wood carved with forms of the cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers.

Choice of the palm trees referred to uprightness and evergreen status. Palestine was known for their palm trees; whose branches refer to peace and conquest. It is as though the house is the palace of the King, Grantor of peace and conquest; or the King of peace.

The temple came like a royal palace to declare that God is the hidden King, who reigns and ordains the affairs of His people. Like the palaces of kings, it is provided with a hall; and, on the sides, with separate three-stories buildings, that give it a kind of reverence; And, on the inside, paneled with precious woods, carved, and overlaid with pure gold; on account of that it is the dwelling place of the heavenly King.

The adornment of the world is the church adorned with Jesus, the Light of the world.

Comparing the text to what came in the book of Ezekiel 41: 18, it appears that the palm trees were set alternately with the cherubim; a palm tree perpetually appearing between two cherubim. If the true believer flourishes like a palm tree, he is surrounded by the heavenlies on all sides.

It is as though the true temple represents the reconciliation of the heavenlies with the earthlies, and the enjoyment of humanity of the fellowship with the heavenlies through the free gift of God.

8- THE INNER COURT: (36)

“And he built the inner court with three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams” (36)

The inner court here conforms to *“The court of the priests”* (2 Chronicles 4: 9) or (the great court), also called *“the upper court”* in Jeremiah 36: 10, on account of that it is in a higher level than the outer court.

9- THE DURATION OF ITS BUILDING: (37-38)

“In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid, in the month of Ziv. And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its details and according to all its plans. So he was seven years in building it” (37-38)

The temple was built in seven or seven and a half years, including the time of building the court of the priests and the outer court. Yet we notice that this period did not include the works preceding and important to start the actual building, as the preparation of the land, cutting the wood, and cutting the stones. Despite its huge size, beauty, and cost of building it, and the great number of those engaged in its building, yet its area was comparatively small.

The importance of building the temple came in 8: 13, 27; 9: 3; 2 Chronicles 6: 2, etc. being the dwelling place of Jehovah, and the site of His throne. God, for whom the heaven of heavens are not big enough to accommodate, consented to have a house among His people (8: 27), for the dwelling of His name (8: 16, etc; 2 Chronicles 6: 5; 2 Samuel 7: 12).

Comfort in the sanctuary of the holy knowledge:

- + Believing that I have got the true doctrine, and the perception of those things, I said to myself: *“It was too painful for me”* (Psalm 73: 16), until I realized that I should enter into the sanctuary of God, where the cherubim are (Exodus 25: 17-22); namely, into the depth of knowledge; and not to be preoccupied with the vain and unsure views; for *“A fool’s chatter is like a burden on a journey”* (Sirach 21: 16).

We end our talk about the building of the temple of God with the words of the scholar Origen:

+ O Lord Jesus Christ; make me worthy to partake of building your house.
Let us build and adorn a tabernacle for the God of Jacob, our Lord Jesus Christ.

God dwells where holiness is, which we are required to realize; Hence, each of us can set a tabernacle for God in his heart:

Its ten curtains (Exodus 26: 1) refer to keeping the ten commandments.

The fine linen thread, the blue and purple, etc. refer to the good works.

The gold refers to faith (Revelations 3: 18)

The silver refers to preaching (Psalm 12: 6)

The bronze refers to perseverance.

The durable wood refers to the knowledge acquired by the believer in the barren wilderness; and to the perpetual purity.

The linen refers to virginity.

The scarlet refers to martyrdom.

The blue refers to the splendor of love

The purple refers to the hope for the kingdom of heaven.

From all these materials the tabernacle of the meeting is built.

And the soul should also have an altar in the midst of the heart on which the sacrifices of prayers and the burnt offerings of mercy are

offered; and the rams of pride, and the goats of luxury and lust are slain.

The soul has to know how to set a perpetually lighted lampstand, on the right hand of the sanctuary in her heart.

(The scholar Origen)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 6

**YOUR HOUSE IS SET IN THE MIDST OF MY HEART
FOR YOU TO DWELL FOREVER**

- + Solomon built the whole house with all its adornments;
He built it with stones finished at the quarry;
No hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was
being built;
It was built with all its details, so that it lacked nothing whatsoever.
You promised him if he keeps Your commandments, to set for him what
you have said to his father David;
That You would dwell among Your people, and would never forsake them.
- + Behold, Your house is set in me;
In it You find the sanctuary and the Most Holy Place;
The cherubim and all the heavenly hosts would rejoice by Your dwelling in
it;
By Your entrance, my earth would turn into heaven;
By Your dwelling, all would exult;
Dwell forever in my heart, and never depart.

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CHAPTER 7

SOLOMON'S CONSTRUCTION WORKS

After ending his talk about the building of the temple, the dwelling place of God, in seven years, he started to talk about his own dwelling place, which he built in 13 years. While the dimensions of the temple were: 60 X 20 X 25 cubits, the dimensions of his own house were 100 X 50 X 30; Namely, larger than the dwelling place of God. Beside building a throne, separate wings for his house, and for that of Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon built a hall 'portico' for his palace like that in the temple.

1- Constructions for his family use: (1 – 12)

- a- The house of the forest of Lebanon (2)
- b- The hall of pillars (6)
- c- The hall of the throne, the hall of judgment (7)
- d- The hall of the queen, Pharaoh's daughter (8)

2- Furnishing the temple:

- a- The two pillars (13 – 22)
- b- The sea of cast bronze (23 – 26)
- c- The ten carts of bronze (27 – 37)
- d- The ten lavers (38 – 39)
- e- The lavers, the shovels, and the bowls (40 – 50)
- f- Solomon brought in the things which his father David has dedicated (51)

1- CONSTRUCTIONS FOR HIS FAMILY USE:

"But Solomon took thirteen years to build his own house; so he finished all his house" (1)

While Solomon built the house of the Lord in seven years (6: 38); he built his own house in thirteen years; namely almost double the time. But this does not mean that he cared for his own constructions more than for the house of God, for He started by the temple first. The long time it took him to build his own house may be attributed to several reasons, among which are:

- a- King David prepared a lot of things for building the temple; and Solomon himself spent the first three years of his reign for the same goal, which was not the case for the other constructions.
- b- The workers who built the temple were utterly exhausted after such a great effort. Their number must have decreased, so has their ability to work. Besides, Solomon's heart desire to build the temple has been too huge to be compared to his desire to build his own constructions.
- c- The size and area of Solomon's own palace was larger than that of the temple. The royal palace was like a group of buildings connected to one another; which were:
 - The house of the forest of Lebanon (2)
 - The hall of pillars (6)
 - The hall of the throne, the hall of judgment (7)
 - The house of the queen, Pharaoh's daughter (8)

Few details were said to give a complete portrait of the features of those buildings; other than they were located close to and south of the temple, on the eastern plateau by the name "Zion" or "Moriah".

Solomon spent three years to prepare for building the temple, seven years to build it; thirteen years to build his own royal palace and its annexes. And was left with less than seventeen years, during which he was preoccupied with material commitments which took his mind away from raising his own son Rehoboam the proper way he himself was raised. That destroyed all his great achievements. If he cared for raising his son the same way he did in his other endeavors, the

kingdom would never had split, and the people would not have cried out: *"He made our yoke heavy"*.

a- The house of the forest of Lebanon:

"He also built the house of the forest of Lebanon: its length was 100 cubits, its width 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits; with four rows of cedar pillars, and cedar beams on the pillars" (2)

Intending to make the best of everything, however high the cost might be; he had to collect higher taxes from the people. Three thousand years ago, Lebanon had vast stretches of cedar forests. Solomon sent thousands of workers to cut cedar trees and to send them to Jerusalem to build the temple and his own palace with all its annexes, beside his other constructions. Cedars and cypress of Lebanon were exported to Syria, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. And Nebuchadnezzar, as well, abused those forests ((Habakkuk 2: 17). All that along the generations led to the destruction of those forests, despite the continuous efforts to restore them.

The house of the forest of Lebanon was not a dwelling place for Solomon, but was for the royal administration, beside being used to keep weapons (1 kings 10: 17). It was so called, on account of that most of its building materials, wood in particular were brought from Lebanon; and probably because of its beautiful location between trees on all sides; that it was also called *"the king's house"* (1 kings 9: 10).

Some believe that Solomon built this house out of Jerusalem to enjoy a more peaceful atmosphere; and in particular his tendency to use horses and chariots; And that his throne was not an annex to this palace; Whereas, according to others, it, together with the other buildings were all in Jerusalem, directly south of the temple, on the hill by the name of Zion or Moriah

According to some, it was like a huge hall, like the Assyrian palaces, surrounded by a group of chambers in three stories; had four rows of cedar pillars. The chambers were built on three sides, like those of the temple; except that the chambers of the temple were protruding from its walls; while those of the house of the forest of Lebanon were set upon pillars to the inside.

“And it was paneled with cedar above the beams that were on 45 pillars, fifteen to a row. There were windows with beveled frames in three rows, and window was opposite window on three tiers” (3, 4)

There were three stories of 45 chambers on the side of the huge hall; each story include 15 chambers; 6 chambers on each of the long side, and 3 chambers on the third side.

The windows in the middle story were above the windows in the lower story, and the windows of the higher story were above the windows in the middle story. All the windows faced the inner court.

“And all the doorways and doorposts had rectangular frames and window was opposite window in three tiers” (5)

b- The hall of pillars:

“He also made the hall of pillars, its length was 50 cubits, its width was 30 cubits, and in front of them was a portico with pillars, and a canopy was in front of them” (6)

He made a hall with pillars in front of the house of Lebanon, to receive those who come to the king for public issues concerning the people. In the book of proverbs

he spoke of wisdom built upon seven pillars (Proverbs 9: 1). The hall was covered with a ceiling, set upon pillars, but with no walls.

The other front hall, likewise, had pillars, and canopies; perhaps a staircase that leads up to a hall with pillars, that in turn leads to another hall with pillars, then to a third hall that leads to the throne of judgment. According to some, being mentioned after the house of the forest of Lebanon, and before the hall of the throne, refers to the fact that the hall was between those two buildings.

c- The hall of the throne; the hall of judgment:

“Then he made a hall for the throne, the hall of judgment, where he might judge, and it was paneled with cedar from floor to ceiling” (7)

In that hall was the royal throne, described in 1 Kings 10: 18-20; It was not an open hall with pillars, but open only on one side, and surrounded by huge walls on the other three sides. On the throne of judgment, the king used to sit, the way the kings used to sit at the city gate in the old.

d- The house of the queen; Pharaoh's daughter:

“And the house where he dwelt had another court inside the hall, of like workmanship. Solomon also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken as wife” (8)

The three buildings seemed to be on one location connected together: the first Solomon's house, the second for judgments, and the third for women, Pharaoh's daughter in particular. North of the king's house was the temple.

There were three courts;

- The great court that surrounds all the other courts.:
- The middle court, including the king's court.
- The Lord's court, or the inner court.

The entrance to the dwelling courts, including the women's wings, was located in a direction different from that leading to the other royal courts, as a kind of privacy, and according to the old tradition of the East it was located in the innermost reach of the royal palace. The king had his own separate building.

*"All these were of costly stones, hewn to size, trimmed with
sows, inside and out, from the foundation to the caves,
and also on the outside to the great court" (9)*

We read about the large costly stones used in Solomon's buildings and the walls of Jerusalem (7: 9-12; 9: 15); where, on the eastern side, the wall rose up to 77 feet high. In the year 1852, Barkley discovered the quarry from which the great stones of Jerusalem were taken; which, now, is a huge cave that extends beneath the 'Damascus gate', where such stones are still there.

*"The foundation was of costly stones, large stones, some 10
cubits, and some eight cubits. And above were costly
stones hewn to size, and cedar wood. The great court was
enclosed with three rows of hewn stones, and a row of
cedar beams. So were the inner court of the Lord and the vestibule
of the temple" (10-12)*

Work was perfect inside and outside; Inside was paneled with cedar wood; whereas even the stones of the foundation, underneath the ground level, were of large costly stones.

2- FURNISHING THE TEMPLE:

“Now king Solomon sent and brought ‘Hiram’ from Tyre. He was the son of a widow from the tribe of Nephtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a bronze worker. He was filled with wisdom and understanding and skill in working with all kinds of bronze work. So he came to king Solomon and did all his work” (13-14)

Hiram's blood was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles: his mother was from the tribe of Nephtali, and his father was from Tyre. It is as though the Lord intended to have His house built by all men, Jews and Gentiles. As the tabernacle of the meeting, built by the treasures of Egypt, the temple was built by Jewish and Gentile hands. God, the Lover of all humanity, intends to embrace the whole world, to let all enjoy the riches of His exalted grace.

In 2 Chronicles 2: 14, however, it came that Hiram's mother was from the tribe of Dan. According to some, there must have been two Hiram's, both bronze workers; While, according to others, one text refers to her place of birth, while the other text refers to her place of residence; Namely, she was of the tribe of Dan by birth, and from that of Nephtali by residence; And according to a third party, she was from the tribe of Dan by birth, then got married to a man from the tribe of Nephtali, to become through marriage of the later tribe; Then, when widowed, she got married to a man from Tyre, from whom she got her son Hiram.

He presents to us a portrait of the bronze tools used in the temple; though nothing in iron, We find in 1 Chronicles 29: 2, that king David used iron to make some unknown tools of the temple.

a- **The two pillars:** (13-22)

“And he cast two pillars of bronze, each one 18 cubits high, and a line of 12 cubits measured the circumference of each” (15)

No gold was found outside the sanctuary and the most holy place; for the heavenly glories are kept inside. But we find bronze outside, to partake of the sufferings, perseverance, and persistence of the Lord Christ, who in the book of Revelations appears as such: *“His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace”* (Revelations 1: 15). Being clothed with the Lord Christ, we would have the brass by which we trample all the labors and tribulations, and walk toward heaven, persistently and without slothfulness.

It is difficult to know where the two bronze pillars were located in the vestibule of the temple (21), whether they were in the open air, or underneath the ceiling. They were set between the temple and the house of the priests, not to hold a door between them, nor to sustain a structure above them; but for the sake of decoration, and as a symbol. That may be shown by being shorter than to reach the ceiling; and on account of that the temple was built of stones and wood, whereas the two pillars were made of bronze. If they had a structural importance in the building, they would be mentioned together with the details of the building as a whole, and not among the other tools of the temple.

So it was in the Phoenician temples; a pillar or pillars are set with no ceiling above them, as are shown by the ancient coins and figures.

The two pillars were hollow, with a thickness of four fingers (Jeremiah 52: 21). Their height was 18 cubits (35 cubits in 2 Chronicles 3: 15); probably because the author added to it the crown of two capitals (sections): a lower section, the lattice network 5 cubits high (16), and the upper capital (the lily-shaped) 4 cubits high (19); and also added the base of the pillar, 8 cubits high; So the total would be $18 + 5 + 4 + 8 = 35$ cubits; with a circumference of 12 cubits.

"Then he made two capitals (crowns) of cast bronze, to set on the tops of the pillars. The height of one capital was five cubits, and the height of the other capital was five cubits" (16)

Speaking about the Lord's chastisement, the prophet Amos says: *"I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: 'Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake; and break them on the heads of them all'" (Amos 9: 1).* Here he refers to those two pillars, not literally but symbolically; as the wrath of God would blow over His house because of their evil, that the two pillars would fall down ; one of which represents (the joy of the King), and the other (the Lord establishing His kingdom through providing His people with His power). The two pillars would fall down, and the thresholds of the house would shake; and the two crowns would, instead of being a sign of honor and power, would be a tool to break their heads.

"He made a lattice network, with wreaths of chainwork, for the capitals which were on top of the pillars, 7 chains for one capital and 7 chains for the other capital" (17)

Those lattice network of bronze covered the lower part of the crown, and on them were 7 chainworks of bronze.

"So he made the pillars, and two rows of pomegranates above the network all around to cover the capitals that were on the top, and thus he did for the other capital" (18)
"And the capitals which were on top of the pillars of the hall were in the shape of lilies, four cubits" (19)

The order, therefore, might have been from down upward:

-- The base

-- The pillar

- a row of 100 pomegranates
- Above them were the lattice network and the wreaths of chainwork
- Above them was the second row of 100 pomegranates.
- Above it was the shape of lilies

There was no mention of the shape of lilies in the vestibule of the temple.

“The capitals of the two pillars also had pomegranates above by the convex surface which was next to the network; and there were two hundred such pomegranates in rows on each of the capitals all around” (20)

“Above the convex surface”, the lower section of the two capitals were convex, and below it were two rows of pomegranates.

“Then he set up the pillars by the vestibule of the temple; he set up the pillars on the right and called its name ‘Jachin’, and he set up the pillar on the left and called its name ‘Boaz’” (21)

‘Jachin’ means ‘will set’ or ‘will establish’; and ‘Boaz’ means ‘have the strength’. According to some, the two pillars refer to God’s leadership of His people in the wilderness, by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; God grants His people a shade against temptations, and light in the midst of the darkness of the world. And according to others. The two pillars at the gate of the house of the Lord, one refers to the priests, and the other refers to the people; Namely, God grants His worshippers – priests and people – to become living pillars in His holy sanctuary.

He wishes every believer would be a ‘Jachin’; namely, would be set and established by the Lord Himself; not to depend upon human arm. And by God, he would be like ‘Boaz’; namely, bear a heavenly strength against which the hosts of

darkness cannot prevail. For God is our Founder or Establisher (Jachin), and our Strength (Boaz).

In our prayers, as we set forth, as though to the heavenly temple of the Lord, we see those two pillars, full of power and beauty; and our heart would be enflamed by the Spirit of the Lord, and hope would dwell in us.

According to some 'Jachin' means (May the temple endure forever); and 'Boaz' means (Solomon desires that God would grant the temple strength and abidance). While according to others still, the two names together are short of the words: (The king will rejoice in Jehovah's name.

"The tops of the pillars were in the shape of lilies. So the work of the pillars was finished" (22)

b- The Sea of cast bronze☺)(23-26)

"Then he made the Sea of cast bronze, ten cubits from one brim to the other; it was completely round, Its height was five cubits, and a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference"
(23)

The priests used to wash their hands in the laver before entering into the temple. It was called a sea on account of its large size. God's mercies vastly extends like the sea, capable of cleansing and purifying our souls.

+ Hearing about the laver, let us understand that they are, through which we are cleansed from our shameful sins, by the secret water.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

It so seems that the sea of cast bronze and its basins were carried on wheels.
They were for the use of the priests

*“And below its brim were ornamental buds encircling it all around,
ten to a cubit, all the way around the Sea. The
ornamental buds were cast in two rows when it was cast. It stood
on twelve oxen: three looking toward the north,
three looking toward the west, three looking toward the south, and
three looking toward the east; the Sea was set
upon them, and all their back parts pointed inward”(24-25)*

The 12 oxen refer to the 12 tribes of Israel. The purification of that people is not only set upon cleansing with water, but through the sacrifice; For all the tribes represent a priestly nation cleansed by the blood shed for the sanctification of believers.

*“It was a handbreadth thick; and its brim was shaped like the
brim of a cup, like a lily blossom. It contained
two thousand baths” (26)*

c- The ten carts of bronze: (27-37)

*“He also made ten carts of bronze. Four cubits was the length of each cart,
four cubits its width, and three cubits its heights” (27)*

The ten lavers were set upon ten carts; each laver could accommodate 300 gallons of water, almost a ton; rectangular (its length equals its width. According to Jewish writers, those ten lavers were filled with new water to stay always pure. They were used to wash the sacrifice meet; while the priest wash their hands in the Sea of cast bronze.

“And this was the deign of the carts. They had panels, and the panels were between frames” (28)

The panels were like the plates used in schools for writing, made of stones with wooden frame all around. On the carts and the panels were black inscription of oxen, and cherubim, all in bronze.

“On the panels that were between the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim. And on the frames was a pedestal on top. Below the lions and oxen were wreaths of plaited work. Every cart had four bronze wheels and axles of bronze, and its four feet had supports. Under the lavers were supports of cast bronze beside each wreath” (29-30)

The carts could be moved on wheels from one place to another. And because the wheels were underneath, and not on the side of the cart, they had to be fixed on axles of bronze.

“Its opening inside the crown at the top was one cubit in diameter; and the opening was round, shaped like a pedestal, one and a half cubits in outside diameter; and also on the opening were engravings, but the panels were square, not round” (31)

The surface of the cart was holed upward, and on that hole or mouth there was a crown of bronze, to go down the hole; one and a half cubits in outside diameter, and one cubit in inside; namely, it was a hollow disc of half a cubit thickness, As a base of the laver above, the disc stood upon the large square cart below.

“Under the panels were the four wheels, and the axles of the wheels were joined to the cart. The height of a wheel

was one and a half cubits. The workmanship of the wheels was like the workmanship of a chariot wheel; their axle pins, their rims, their spokes, and their hubs were all of cast bronze” (32-33)

This height is low compared to the wheels of the carts nowadays; but the Assyrian inscriptions show that that was the custom in those days.

“And there were four supports at the four corners of each cart, and its supports were part of the cart itself. On the top of the cart, at the height of half a cubit, it was perfectly round. And on the top of the cart, its flanges and its panels were of the same casting. On the plates of the flanges, and on its panels he engraved cherubim, lions,, and palm trees, wherever there was a clear space on each, with wreaths all around. After this manner he made the ten carts. All of them were of the same mold, one measure, and one shape” (34-37)

The round part on the top of the cart was to add strength; on account of that upon it the disc stood, which, in turn, stood upon the laver, which was very heavy, particularly when it is full of water. The flanges were probably to support the laver. All parts were of cast bronze.

d- The ten lavers: (38-39)

“Then he made ten lavers of bronze, each laver contained forty baths, and each laver was four cubits. On each of the ten carts was a laver” (38)

The four cubits was most probably the height of the laver, and not its diameter. Together with its carts, the laver was nine cubits high. The ten lavers were put on their carts to be filled with water, used by the priests in their holy task of cleansing the sacrifices, like the burnt offerings (2 Chronicles 4: 6). The water of the Sea of cast bronze was used by the priests for washing their hands. All the tools of the temple were done with the highest level of art, beside their huge cost, concerning their material and the working hands.

“And he put five carts on the right side of the house, and five on the left side of the house. He set the Sea on the right side of the house toward the southeast” (39)

Five carts were put on the right side, namely, toward the south; and five on the left side, namely, toward the north; and the Sea of cast bronze was put on the right side toward the east . The carts were not put on the right and left side of the altar of burnt offering, but of the house, namely, the vestibule of the temple. As for the Sea of cast bronze, it was put between the vestibule and the altar, more toward the south, namely, southeast of the vestibule, and southwest of the altar of burnt offering. The carts were carried on wheels to be easily moved to the priests, to provide them with water when preoccupied with the sacrifices; and to easily dispose of the dirty water.

There was great need of those ten lavers, on account of that more than one sacrifice were offered on the altar at one time.

The carts bore the same adornments that were made inside the temple, to confirm that that sacrificial work was an extension of the work inside the temple; with the only difference that inside the temple the adornment was overlaid with a layer of gold, whereas here, it is overlaid with a layer of bronze; on account of that the inside refers to crossing over to heaven; whereas the outside is a preparation for it.

"Hiram made the lavers and the shovels and the bowls. So Hiram finished all the work that he was to do for king Solomon on the house of the Lord" (40)

Many old authors referred to the skill of the workers from Tyre as far as the metal tools are concerned. So, no wonder that Solomon hired Hiram from Tyre, together with a great team of skilled workers to make the golden and bronze tools of the temple, and those of his palaces, in relatively short time.

"The two pillars, the two bowl-shaped capitals that were on top of the two pillars, and the two networks covering the two bowl-shaped capitals which were on top of the pillars; four hundred pomegranates for each network, to cover the two bowl-shaped capitals that were on top of the pillars.; the ten carts, and ten lavers on the carts; one Sea, and twelve oxen under the Sea; the pots, the shovels, and the bowls. All these articles which Hiram made for king Solomon for the house of the Lord were of burnished bronze" (41-45)

The bronze used for the articles of the temple were of the best quality in that time; for God seeks from man to present the best he has, to proclaim his response with God's exalted and complete love, and His desire to present the greatest gifts to man.

"In the plain of Jordan the king had them cast in clay molds, between Succoth and Zaretan" (46)

The bronze was cast in the plain of Jordan, so that the atmosphere in Jerusalem would not be polluted by the smoke; so that the city of God, and His temple, would stay pure on all sides.

According to some, it would be difficult to say if the expression “*in the plan of Jordan*” refers to its east or west bank. While, according to others, it is the plain of Jordan on the eastern bank, close to the mouth of the River Jebok, at Zerthan or Zaretan (Joshua 3: 16); or Zaratanah (1 kings 4: 12); or Zeredatha (2 Chronicles 4: 17).

Succoth was east of the Jordan; most probably ‘Dralah’ nowadays, one mile south of the River ‘El-Zarkah’. Zaretan was west of the River, probably ‘Tel-Hazem’ nowadays, three miles south of Bissan.

It is the land of ceramics. Up to this day the sand from this region is used in casting bronze. For so huge quantities of tools, undoubtedly, a great numbers of furnaces must have been needed.

“And Solomon did not weigh all the articles, because there were so many; the weight of the bronze was not determined” (47)

And because those working in the house of the Lord, and to His account were characterized by honesty and faithfulness.

“Solomon had all the furnishing made for the house of the Lord: the altar of gold, and the table of gold on which was the showbread; the lampstands of pure gold, five on the right side, and five on the left in front of the inner sanctuary, with the flowers and the lamps, and the wick-trimmers of gold” (48, 49)

Because the name of 'Hiram' was not mentioned here, we can deduce that he did not partake of the making of the golden vessels of the house of the Lord, but his work was restricted to the bronze articles, which were not used inside the house of the Lord.

According to the scholar Origen, the gold is the faith which turns the heart into heaven; hence gold refers to the heavenlies. Referring, as well, to the saints as being heaven, and God dwells in their hearts, he says: [If you believe, you present to the Lord your heart, feelings, and words as gold]; ...

The believer will thus see in the golden articles, dedicated to the Lord, his inner life that, by faith, turned into heaven; which nobody has the right to use except the heavenly Holy One Himself.

According to father Methodius, the gold is a symbol of virginity; he says: [God commanded that the articles used in the Most Holy place should be made of gold, for two reasons: First that it never rust, and second that its color is close to that of the sun; by which it suits the virginity that bears nothing unclean nor wrinkled; but perpetually shines with the line of the word. Through it we stand close to God in the Most Holy place, and before the veil, with undefiled hands like incense, we offer prayers to the Lord, as nice acceptable fragrance, in the golden censers of the twenty four priests, which are the prayers of the saints].

The altar of incense was of built of stone, overlaid with cedar, overlaid with gold (6: 20, 21).

+ Let everyone of us meditate in how he could build inside himself a dwelling place for God.

Let there be in the depths of the soul an altar of incense, to be able to say:
“*We are to God the fragrance of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 2: 15)

Let us talk about the inner altar of incense, saying: The soul that *will not give sleep to her eyes, ... until she finds a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob*" (Psalm 132: 4), will acquire for herself in the midst of her heart, a steadfast altar to be able to approach God.

(The scholar Origen)

While there was only one table of showbread in the tabernacle of the meeting; there were ten of them in the temple; yet, most probably, only one was used at a time.

And while there was only one lampstand in the tabernacle of the meeting (Exodus 25: 30), there were ten of them in the temple; yet, most probably only one was used at a time (2 Chronicles 4: 8, 19; 3: 11).

e- The lavers, the shovels, and the bowls: (50)

"The basins, the trimmers, the bowls, the ladles, and the censers of pure gold, and the hinges of gold, both for the doors of the inner room (the Most Holy Place), and for the doors of the main hall" (50)

The basins were for the oil; the golden trimmers were used to mend the fabric bands of the lamps; the bowls for the water, the blood; and the burnt out bands.

According to some, all the furniture, like the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant, were made of wood overlaid with pure gold, to proclaim the splendor of the glory of God; and were not displayed outside, to keep the people from idol-worship.

- f- **Solomon brought in the things which his father David has dedicated:**
(51)

“Thus all the work that king Solomon had done for the house of the Lord was finished; and Solomon brought in the things which his father David had dedicated, the silver and the gold and the furnishings. And he put them in the treasuries of the house of the Lord” (51)

Solomon brought in the things that his father David had dedicated, of silver and gold, and put them in the treasuries of the house of the Lord, did not use any in his own palaces, but presented them together with what he, himself, presented to the Lord. So it is befitting of us to present what our parents had presented to the Lord, and not count them as our own inheritance.

St. John Chrysostom used to exhort his congregation to count the Lord Christ as one of their children, to have the right of inheritance in what they leave for them. The Copts in the old days used to dedicate much to the church, to spend on the poor, or for the routine expenditures; and to leave a will committing their children to honor their dedication.

AN INSPIRATION OF 1 KINGS 7

RECEIVE ALL THE GOLDEN FURNITURE

- + You are the First in everything;
Let Your temple be built first, then my own palace
Let Your kingdom be the rejoice of my heart;
Let me seek it first, then everything would increase for me.

- + Let me, together with Solomon, set two pillars of bronze;
Which I call: 'Jachin' and 'Boaz';
Perceiving that you are the living pillar;
You are my strength, pride, and honor;

- + Let me put a Sea of cast bronze;
To be perpetually cleansed by the water of baptism;
To enjoy sonship to You;
And to minister to You with purity.

- + Receive all the golden furniture
Let Your house on the inside be entirely overlaid with gold;
Nothing in it will be seen but glory and splendor;
No one will minister in it but he who becomes pure gold;
No one will encounter You, but he who bears Your splendor in him
Receive me as a pure golden vessel
Which has its place in the dwelling place of Your sanctuary.

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CHAPTER 8

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

This chapter reveals God's longing for man. He, whom heaven and earth cannot contain, finds pleasure in dwelling in the midst of His people. Inclines His ears to listen to their requests, blesses them, and turns their life into a perpetual feast.

Solomon's heart was enflamed with joy in those moments for which he waited so long, and for which his father David desired. He did not rejoice alone, but with him were the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the priests, the Levites, and all the people. For it has been a work that touched the life of every believer, whatever his role was.

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1- A CALL TO THE LEADERSHIPS AND THE PEOPLE: (1-2)

“Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, to king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the arc of the covenant of the Lord from the city of David which is Zion” (1)

According to Archbishop Usher, Solomon postponed the dedication of the temple for about a year after finishing its building; to do it on the first year of the fourth thousand jubilee, namely , in year 3001 of creation. If God created the whole world to be a palace for man to live like a king of authority; On the inauguration of the fourth thousand Jubilee of creation, man presents this building as a symbolic work of the longing of creatures to have the King of kings live and reign in His palace.. God presented the whole world as a palace for us, and we, in our weakness, present very little of what He granted us, as a palace for Him, He who could never be limited by a place. He intends to set kings out of us, but we insist on having Him as the King of kings who moves us by His royal Spirit.

“And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month of Ethanim, which is the seventh month” (2)

The way king David was at the head of the celebration of bringing forth the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, so was his son Solomon, at the head of the celebration of the dedication of the house of the Lord. That celebration could not be realized by the presence of the king alone, nor together with all the men of his state; but should be shared with all the religious and civil leaderships, the priests, and the whole people; as it was a declaration of the dwelling of God among His people.

Cherishing the bond between him and the people, Solomon called himself “preacher”, “teacher” (Ecclesiastes 1: 1), and “scholar” (Ecclesiastes 12: 11).

The month of “Ethanim”, or “Trchri”, corresponds to a part of October and another part of November.

Despite the beauty and exaltation of the temple, Without the arc of the covenant in it, it would be like a body without a spirit, a house with no resident, or a lampstand without a lamp. All what was done by king David and his son king Solomon, of preparation and execution of the building of the temple, would lose its value, if the Lord does not live in it, and proclaim His glory inside it.

2- THE ROLE OF THE PRIESTS: (3 – 9)

“Then all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. And they brought up the Ark of the Lord, the tabernacle of meeting, and all the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites brought them up” (3, 4)

Together with the ark of the covenant they brought forth the tabernacle of meeting, that was probably the same one built by the prophet Moses; then temporarily set in Zion until the building of the temple. The temple, with all what it bears of holiness is an extension of the tabernacle with all its holiness. God who filled the tabernacle with His glory, is He Himself who, yesterday, today, and forever, fills His church along all eras with His divine glory.

“And king Solomon and all the congregation of Israel who were assembled to him were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be counted or numbered for multitude” (5)

Presenting sacrifices was a work of two aspects: One of reconciliation with God by blood together with repentance; and another aspect of thanksgiving together with joy for the salvation work of God. Presenting sacrifices to God by the king and the whole people, is therefore a proclamation of true longing for reconciliation together with true joy and an exultation for the fellowship with God.

“Then the priests brought in the ark of the covenant to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the Most

Holy Place , under the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread their two wings over the place of the ark;

and the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. And the poles extended so that the ends of the poles could

be seen from the holy place, in front of the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen from outside. So they are

there to this day” (6-8)

Not forgetting the bitter experience of his father David, when God's anger was aroused on Uzzah, who stretched his hand to the ark of God (2 Samuel 6: 6). Solomon learned that the ark of the Lord should only be touched or carried by the priests.

“There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made

a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out from the land of Egypt” (9)

The pot of Manna and the rod of Aaron, were beside the ark. God intended to bind between His divine presence and His Word. Whoever encounters God enjoys His Word In Him, not separate from Him, but one with Him.

- + It is befitting of the bride of Christ to be like the ark, overlaid by gold on the inside and the outside (Exodus 25: 11); It is befitting of her to be a keeper of the law of the Lord. Like the ark which contains nothing but the two tablets of the covenant, it is befitting of you to have no outer thoughts; for the Lord would have pleasure to sit in your mind, as He did once when He sat on the throne of mercy, and on the cherubim (Exodus 25: 22).

(St. Jerome)

3- GOD'S GLORY IN HIS HOUSE: (10-11)

"And it came to pass when the priests came out of the holy place that the cloud filled the house of the Lord" (20)

This phrase reveals that the book was written before the first desolation of the temple.

The appearance of the clouds filling the temple was a sign of God's pleasure on what the king and the people did together; the way it happened in the days of the prophet Moses (Exodus 16: 10; 40: 38; Numbers 9: 18 etc.).... Why so?

The cloud refers to the holy souls that become as light as the clouds, rising up to heaven. The appearance of the clouds is a confirmation that the glory of God is proclaimed in His saints who rise with their hearts up to heaven, to become like a cloud bearing Him.

"So that the priests could not continue ministering because of the clouds; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (11)

Although the building and furnishing of the temple was a climax of magnificence and beauty; Yet its glory was not because of the huge stones, the silver and gold,

but because of the dwelling of God in it. It is God, Himself, who gives His church its splendor and inner glory.

After putting the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy place, all the priests came out before the start of the ministry; as it was not allowed for anyone to enter into it except the High Priest.

The house of the Lord and the heavenly icon:

- + God made us according to His image and likeness; as He teaches us, saying: *“See, O Jerusalem, I have inscribed your walls”* (Isaiah 49: 16). If we walk well, that heavenly icon will abide in us; Otherwise that image; namely, the icon of Him who came down from heaven, would be taken away, (or would be distorted), and only the image of the earthly man would remain in him. Accordingly, the apostle Paul says: *“As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly Man”* (1 Corinthians 15: 49). That is why the images of the good men continue to shine in the city of God. But if man divert to the deadly sins and does not repent, the heavenly icon would be destroyed in him, or would be cast away, the way Adam was cast away from paradise (Genesis 3: 21-24). But he who walks in holiness, will enter into the city of God (Revelations 3: 12), and will shine with his personal image in the city of God. But he who clothed himself with the works of darkness, will never shine in the light.

(St. Ambrose)

4- THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE: (12 – 66)

a- Remembering the promises of God:

At the beginning of the rite of dedication, the Lord proclaimed His dwelling in His house, and the dwelling of His glory in it, to reveal His exalted love. He initiates love, and longs for pouring His glory upon His believers. And the believers are committed, in their turn, to respond to His love by love; by remembering His divine promises, by entering into a debate of love with Him; by having a wide heart toward their brethren; by trusting in the enjoyment of the spirit of conquest and victory; by joyfully keeping the divine commandment; by presenting the sacrifices of love, accepted by Him, beside practicing the joyful life as a shadow of the heavenly life. This, in short, what we would call the dedication of the house of the Lord. It is a mixture of the mutual love between God and men, together with prayers, praises, obedience, giving, and unceasing joy.

If the church practices a special rite for dedication, the dedication of the church by prayers and praises, is a starting, as well as a final point. The priests, together with the people remain practicing love, together with prayers and joy, with the spirit of obedience, to experience the dedication as the work of the Holy Spirit, continuous in the life of the church.

The house of the Lord is not just a place for practicing worship, but it is a place for a living encounter with God, the Lover of mankind; where the believers enjoy the mutual love with God, and with one another, and partake with the heavenly hosts, of their continuous joy.

At the dedication of the tabernacle of meeting, the glory of God filled the sanctuary; that Moses could not enter into it (Exodus 40: 34-35); The same thing happened at the dedication of the temple.

Some erroneously mix between the appearance of the cloud of the divine glory in the temple, and that of the smoke coming up from the altar of burnt offering, when a multitude of sacrifices are presented. But the text clearly indicate that the cloud here in the house, is not that of smoke, but that of the divine glory.

The glory of God that appears as a consuming fire (Exodus24: 17; Deuteronomy 9: 3), that no one could stand, proclaims itself here as a glorious cloud, which covers, not only the Most Holy place, but the whole temple, so that all the people would enjoy that glory, and that all would perceive the pleasure of God to dwell among them, and to accept dwelling in the house set for Him.

“Then Solomon spoke: ‘The Lord said He would dwell in the dark cloud’” (12)

When the disciples of the Lord, at the time of His transfiguration on the Mount, entered into the cloud of light, they were fearful (Luke 9: 34); So the priests were when the cloud of the glory of the Lord filled the house; Hence Solomon, gave a sermon which, beside encouraging them, was in essence a song of praise to God who granted him what his father longed for; as though by this praise he pays a debt on behalf of his father.

The cloud was as though a divine voice through which the Lord says: ‘I, in truth, am coming to dwell in my house, and to dwell among you’ And Solomon’s praise came like a response to that divine voice, as though saying to Him: [‘Yes, Come, O Lord, as You have already promised. Come, for the house is Your house, of Your goodness and graces on us; we built it for You; for You alone; and for no one but You.’]

*“I have surely built You an exalted house, and a place for You to dwell in forever’. And the king turned around
and blessed the whole congregation of Israel, while all the
congregation of Israel were standing” (13)*

The Holy Book did not mention the words by which Solomon blessed the congregation; It was probably the same blessing by which the high priest blesses

the people: *“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel, say to them: ‘The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I shall bless them’”*
(Numbers 6: 22-27).

It so seems that Solomon, here, took over the role of the high priest (except for offering the sacrifices); or the role played by the prophet Moses in his leadership of the people to worship the Lord. In his blessing, Solomon, did like his father David, about whom it is said that when he, and all the house of Israel, brought the ark of God up to the city of David: *“And when David had finished offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts”* (2 Samuel 6: 18).

“He dwells in the dark cloud” (12). What does the “dark cloud” here means but that the creation could not see God as He is; but each sees Him as much as his eyes can.

“Then he said: ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David, and with His hand has fulfilled it, saying: Since the day that I brought My people Israel out of Egypt, I have chosen no city of any of the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there, but I chose David to be over My people Israel’. Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. But the Lord said to my father David: ‘Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for My name; you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son, who

*shall come from your loins, he shall build the house for My name. .
So the Lord has fulfilled His word which
He spoke, and I have filled the position of my father David, and sit
on the throne of Israel, as the Lord
promised, and I have built a house for the name of the Lord God of
Israel. And there I have made a place
for the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord, which He made
with our fathers, when He brought them out
of the land of Egypt” (15 – 21).*

Solomon did not refer to the greatness of the house, the magnificence of its building, nor to its valuable treasures; but referred to two things, which are the secret of the power, holiness, and glory of the house: the first, the divine promise to David, and the second, the presence of a place for the ark of the covenant, seen as a center and a star for the whole house, representing the divine presence; . The secret of its power is the divine promise, and the divine presence.

So it is for the church; its power is the divine commandment, or the divine promise, and the covenant by which we have got the reconciliation with the Father, and our enjoyment of salvation, to enjoy the fellowship of the heavenly glory.

b- Praising God:

*“Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of
all the congregation of Israel, and spread
out his hands toward heaven” (22)*

Solomon's face was toward the Most Holy Place, when the priests brought the ark of the covenant in, and as they got out when the cloud filled the house. he

started his talk with his face toward the Most Holy Place; But now, when he started blessing the people, he turned his face toward them (14). For no one should bless someone else, while giving him the back, but should face him. In the church, as well, when the priest blesses someone, or the whole congregation, he gives them his face, even when he stands before the altar.

The dedication of the temple bore the following living concepts of the house of the Lord:

-- **The house of the sacrifice:** Solomon and the whole people offered a multitude of sacrifices; for *"without blood shed, there can be no forgiveness"* (Hebrew 9: 22). St. Agnatus defined the church as "the place of sacrifice". For in the church we encounter the Lord Christ, the true Sacrifice, and unite with Him, so that our life would become an exalted living sacrifice of love.

-- **The house of prayer:** Solomon raised a prayer for the dedication.

-- **The house of joy:** The dedication was joy for all. The church is a life in the Lord, the Grantor of perpetual joy.

-- **The house of praise:** Solomon blessed and praised the Lord. According to St. Augustine, [You should care to gather together in a multitude to present thanksgiving and glory to God. For every time you gather together for the holy Eucharist, the power of the devil will deteriorate before your faith].

-- **The house of love:** Love, Solomon sought, not only for the sake of his own people, but for all the people of the earth.

By the altar of the Lord here, before which Solomon raised his prayer before the whole congregation, is meant the altar of the burnt offering and not the altar of incense,

*“And he said, ‘Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above, or on earth below like You, who keep
Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before you with all their heart” (23)*

“Who keep Your covenant and mercy”. Solomon learned this from his father David who proclaims in his praise to God: *“He is the tower of salvation to His king; and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore”* (2 Samuel 22: 51). As David perceived that God makes mercy by fulfilling His divine promises which He presented to him, and to the account of his descendants forevermore. In this, David enjoyed the same thought lived by the prophet Moses who says: *“Therefore know that the Lord Your God is , He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments”* (Deuteronomy 7: 9). God is faithful in His promises, it is befitting of His own, therefore, to be faithful to Him, not by writing false eloquent poems, but by faithfully keeping His commandments; to glorify Him, not by words, but by works. He is faithful *“for a thousand generations”*, for He is the fountain of love along the generations.

*“You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father;
You have both spoken with Your mouth, and
fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day” (24)*

After giving thanks to God, who kept His covenant, and fulfilled His divine promises, Solomon asked Him for the following:

-- Durability of the throne of Israel, by keeping His commandments (25)

- Continuation of the divine presence among His people.(29)
- Condemnation of the wicked, and the justification of the righteous (32, 31)
- Salvation from the enemies through the forgiveness of sins (33)
- Salvation from calamities (35-40)
- Giving support to the godly foreigner (41-43)
- Giving conquest in the battles to come (45, 44)
- Liberation from captivity through the collective forgiveness (46-50)
- Continuation of the divine covenant set with the people (51-53)

“Therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep what You promised Your servant David my father, saying: ‘You shall not fail to have a man sit before Me on the throne of Israel; only if your sons take heed to their way, that they walk before Me as you have walked before Me. And now I pray, O God of Israel, let Your word come true, which You have spoken to Your servant David my father. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less the temple which I have built!’” (25-27)

Solomon raised a long prayer, and what came here are just quotations of his prayer. For, once the heart open widely to God, the mouth would find no difficulty to talk to his beloved God.

- + Living on earth, clothed in the body, and dwelling among his fellow men, He is affected by the bond and harmony between the righteous, who build and set a new temple. The believers are the earth, which, as well, is compared to the greatness of God. Hence the blessed Peter did not hesitate to say: *“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2: 5).

God sanctifies the circumcised body, as a holy place for Him on earth; having said: *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’* . Then the Jews said, *‘It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’*. But He was speaking of the temple of His body” (John 2: 19-21).

c- A prayer and a supplication:

“Yet regard the prayer of Your servant, and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today” (28)

It is love that makes God condescend to dwell in such a house. Whatever Solomon and his people present to God, there would never be anything befitting to present to the Mighty and limitless Creator. Yet, for the sake of His love, He receives our gifts which we get from His hands, to present to Him as though it is from us.

“That Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, ‘My name shall be there’, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place” (29)

By saying: *“My name shall be there”*, he means God’s presence in His house among His people; where He presents His strength a strength for them; His glory, as inner glory for their souls; lightens their eyes to make them perceive His divine secrets, and understand His plans toward them; He grants them continuous growth, and forgiveness of their sins, and sanctification for their spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional being; and joyful salvation. That is the dwelling of God’s name in His house.

*“And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel. When they pray toward this place,
then hear in heaven, Your dwelling place; and when You hear,
forgive” (30)*

It is a prayer of a servant in need of his Creator and Master; yet it represents an inner cry-out of his heart, enflamed with faith and love.

The temple, the ark of the covenant, with all their articles, are all symbols of the Word of God, who incarnated, and whose body became a holy temple, through whom we pray. He is the intermediary through whom we encounter the Father. The Lord Christ brings us forth into the bosom of His Father, whom we hear forgiving us by the blood of the Savior, and justifies us by His resurrection.

*“When anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes and takes an oath before
Your altar in this temple; then hear in heaven and act and judge
Your servant, condemning the wicked,
bringing his way on his head, and justifying the righteous by giving
him according to his righteousness” (31-32)*

He starts by the harmed party, who has doubt against someone being is the cause of the harm that came upon him. He brings him over to the house of the Lord and let him take an oath. If he falsely swears, the Lord will condemn him; and if he truly swears, He will justify him.

*“When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy
because they have sinned against You, and when they
turn back to You and confess Your name, and pray and make
supplication to You in this temple, then hear in*

heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers”

(33-34)

After presenting the previous examples of those who cry-out to the Lord, toward His temple, here, he presents a general supplication for the sake of all. The temple has been a symbol of the Lord Christ who stretches His hands to embrace everyone; who longs to give generously to whoever asks Him.

God has previously warned them that He would allow for them to be defeated and captivated if they persist on their evil ways, saying: *“I will set My face against You, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursue you”* (Leviticus 26: 17, 18); *“The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; You shall go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become (an object of horror) to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your corpses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten them away”* (Deuteronomy 28: 25-26).

Before they enter into the promised land, and enjoy conquest over the nations dwelling in the land of Canaan, the Lord confirmed to them that in case they disobey His commandment, they would lose their conquest and their honor, and their corpses would be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, whether on the level of the people as a whole or on the level of individuals. And as the prophet Ahijah said to Jeroboam’s wife: *“The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field; for the Lord has spoken it”* (1 kings 14: 11). And as it came in the psalm: *“O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance. Your holy temple they have defiled. They have laid Jerusalem in heaps. The dead bodies of Your servants, they have given as food for the birds of heavens; the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth”* (Psalm 79: 1-2). The Lord says on

the tongue of the prophet Jeremiah: *"The days are coming, says the Lord, ... the corpses of this people will be food for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth. And no one will frighten them away"* (Jeremiah 7: 32-33). The literal translation of the phrase: *"You shall become an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth"* (25) is: All the nations of the earth will move it here and there, up and down; namely, it will become like a ball for all the nations of the earth to play with. And as said in Jeremiah: *"I shall hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth"* (Jeremiah 15: 14); and *"I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them"* (Jeremiah 24: 9; 29: 18).

God will allow for them to be defeated before all nations to perceive their inner defeat before sin. And will allow for them to be captivated to make them seek their liberation from the captivity of the devil, and from the bondage of lusts and sins.

"When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You; when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk, and give rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance. When there is famine in the land, or pestilence, blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities, whatever plague or whatever sickness there is". (35-37)

Here, he includes a series of calamities that may dwell upon the people as a fruit of their disobedience to the Lord:

Hunger: a great reduction in the grain, wheat in particular, as a result of draught.

Pestilence: Spread of deadly contagious illnesses.

Blight and mildew: When the plants are infected for any reason; the ear grains do not mature, but carry some kind of black dust instead of seeds or wheat; the little blossoms or flowers fall off the branches.

Locusts: A plague that sometimes come upon vast stretches of land, when huge waves of locusts consume everything green on earth..

Grasshoppers: are the locusts in their early stages of growth, Locusts come from far lands, whereas grasshoppers appear on the same land.

An **enemy** attacks and besieges the land and cities.

Whatever **plague** dwells upon man or animal, or plants.

Whatever **sickness** makes man lose his energy and ability to work and produce.

*“Whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows
the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward the temple” (38)*

Speaking of the prayer in the time of affliction, when man prays toward the temple, as though toward God Himself, namely, toward the divine presence, he should not put the blame upon the circumstances nor upon any person, but looks deep at *“the plague of his own heart”*, putting the blame upon himself, and upon the narrowness of his own heart, struck by the draught of love toward the others. That is the real plague, for which we should cry-out to God.

*“Then hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways
whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men)” (39)*

By saying: *"Forgive, act, and give"*, Solomon presents a sound spiritual concept of our look at the house of the Lord. It is not just a place where we seek only our temporal needs, but it is the house of forgiveness, the house of divine action, and the house of heavenly gifts; where we encounter with God in His house, to seek, first reconciliation with Him, and to enter into a relationship of unity and love, for then we may enjoy His divine action in our inner life, and enjoy His gifts that satisfy all our spiritual, mental, social, and material needs. By forgiveness, we may enjoy the gifts of giving, and by the divine act, we receive in us His possibilities; and by giving, we get His goods. It is as though the king here seeks that the believers enjoy God Himself, His abilities, and His gifts.

"That they may fear you all the days that they live in the land which you gave to our fathers" (40)

a- Proclaiming love for all men:

"Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for Your name's sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm), when he comes and pray before this temple; Hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and do according to all of which the foreigner calls to you, that all people of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name" (41-43)

The strong hand and the outstretched arm refer to the exalted care of God for His people.

Balaam, who came from the land of Moab (Numbers 22) heard of God's amazing works with His people.

In the prayer of dedication, Solomon, the Sage, looking at God , being, not God of Israel alone, but God of all the people of the earth, He asks Him to listen to the prayers of all, that all the peoples of the land may know His name and fear Him. (See also 2 Chronicles 6: 32)

The prophet Moses allowed the strangers who sojourn among the children of Israel to present sacrifices in the tabernacle of meeting (Numbers 15: 14, etc.); and it is said that the great name of the Lord and His outstretched arm were heard by the surrounding nations (Exodus 15: 14; 18: 1; Joshua 5: 1).

He talks here of some heathens who came to the house of the Lord to become proselytes in the true faith.

b- A request for conquest:

“When Your people go out to battle against their enemy, wherever You send them, and when they pray to the Lord toward the city which You have chosen , and toward the temple which I have built for Your name; then hear in heaven their prayer, and their supplication, and maintain their cause. When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near” (44-46)

By saying, “There is no one who does not sin” he does not mean to justify the sinner, but shows the human weakness to draw the mercies of God, and, at the

same time, to open the door of hope before the sinners, on account of that all, with no exception, are in need of the work of the Savior.

- + Wisdom, particularly on the way, proves to be far better than the company of the strongest men in the city; and it truly forgives those who fail in doing their duty, for there is not a single one with no offense.

(St. Gregory the wonder-maker)

- + Paul, the chosen vessel says: *"For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all"* (Romans 11: 32); And, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3: 21). And the preacher, who speaks in the name of the divine wisdom, openly says: *"For there is no just man on earth who does good and does not sin"* (Ecclesiastes 8: 20).
"And when Your people sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin)" (1 Kings 8: 46).
"Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?'" (Proverb 20: 9).; For no one is pure and without blemish even though his life on earth be a single day; which was also confirmed by the prophet David, saying: *"I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin, my mother conceived me"* (Psalm 51: 5); and in another psalm he says: *"In Your sight no one living is righteous"* (Psalm 143: 2). Saying, *"In Your sight"*, he refers to that those who may seem saints in the sight of men, may not be as such in the sight of God, in His perfect knowledge. ; *"For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"* (1 Samuel 16: 7).

(St. Jerome)

“And when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, ‘We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness’. And when they return to You with all their heart and all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and the temple which I have built for Your name” (47-48)

Here Solomon prays with the spirit of prophecy, and sees what will dwell upon the people and upon the temple of the Lord, by the Babylonian captivation on the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in the year 586/5 B.C.. By saying, *“When they return to You with all their heart”*, he confirms the importance of prayer and repentance from the heart.

- + God does not seek the words, but seeks the hearts.
- + By the heart we ask, and by the heart we seek, and by the voices of the heart, the door is opened.
- + Crying out to God is not done by a carnal voice, but by the heart. There are many with silent lips, but they cry out with their hearts; While there are many who produce loud noise with their lips, when their hearts are unable to present anything. Therefore, if you cry out to God, do it from the heart , for there He listens to you.

(St. Augustine)

“Then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication and maintain their cause; and

forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You; and grant them compassion before those who took them captive, that they may have compassion on them” (49-50)

God, with whose love He moves everyone to the edification of our souls, is He who allows for chastisement, and even for captivation; and who moves the hearts of those who captivate, whether to practice their violence, yet within the limits He sets; or to practice mercy, and let His people find favor in their sight; about which the psalmist says: *“For their sake He remembered His covenant; and relented according to the multitude of His mercies. He also made them to be pitied by all those who carried them away captives”* (Psalm 106: 45, 46).

Solomon did not pray for the sake of their release from captivity, by returning to their land, but for getting compassion before those who took them captive, to let them worship the Lord and testify to Him in the land of their captivity,.

“(For they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace), that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant, and the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You” (51-52)

Assuming that he and his people are men of prayer in all their affairs, who concentrate their eyes upon the house of the Lord, and open their mouths to talk to Him, and their hearts to cry-out to Him, Solomon presents specific cases:

-- In case of judgment between the people, to justify the righteous and to punish the wicked; Namely, responding to the prayer of a member in the holy congregation.

-- In case of the defeat before an enemy; namely, in case of a collective calamity.

-- In case of a natural calamity, like a pestilence or draught.

-- In case a foreigner comes to seek from the true God, trusting in Him, and not in his idols.

He presents four examples of God's response to prayer, whether on the level of the individual or of the congregation as a whole, as well as of foreigners; with the assumption that whatever dwell upon the individual or the congregation, is the fruit of sin. Hence he binds the prayer with repentance, and the return to God.

"For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by the hand of Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God" (53)

c- Blessing the people:

"And so it was, when Solomon finished praying all this prayer and supplication to the Lord, that he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven" (54)

Solomon presented to us a living portrait of prayer; he prayed before the altar of the Lord, humbly kneeling on his knees, and spreading his hands toward heaven, to bear, together with godliness, the image of the cross, the gate to heaven.

So the apostle Paul used to pray, kneeling, saying, *"For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 3: 14).

God stretches His hands to proclaim embracing all men, to receive their prayers, and to proclaim His longing to grant the believer all his needs; And the believer spreads his hands in prayer to proclaim the width of his heart, and his longing that his heart would ascend by love up to heaven. Spreading the hands refers, as well, to that the believer's sureness that he gets from God, heavenly gifts which he receives by his hands to carry to his heart.

"Then he stood and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying: 'Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses. May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. . And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the Lord, be near the Lord our God day and night, that he may maintain the cause of His servant, and the cause of His people Israel, as each day may require, that the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God, there is no other'" (55-60)

As Solomon ended his sermon in the book of Ecclesiastes, to give a summary of what he said, here does he same here:

- He gives glory to God for the sake of His works with His people (56)
- He refers to the true promises of God to the prophet Moses and the prophet David, and to how all His words were fulfilled (56)

- He opens the door of hope before the people; As God was with our fathers, so he will be with us, and will never forsake us (57)
- He confirms our need for God to incline our hearts to Himself, to keep His commandment (58)
- God listens to the prayers (59)
- God is glorified in His people Israel among all the peoples of the earth (60).

Solomon often repeats his confirmation of the need for the divine presence, for the enjoyment of the strength of His grace, for his receiving our prayers, and for the glorification of God among the peoples of the earth.

d- A call to keep the commandment:

“Let your heart, therefore, be loyal to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes, and keep His commandments, as at this day” (61)

e- Offering sacrifices of love:

“Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord” (62)

As the reign of Solomon was characterized by peace, and riches, that reflected on the economic status of the people; it was the duty of the people, together with the sacrifice of praise and joy, to offer of what God granted them of riches and sheep as sacrifices.

“And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered to the Lord, 22,000 bulls, and 120,000 sheep.

So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord” (63)

To counter the wrong assumption by some people that it is impossible for Solomon to offer such a huge number of sacrifices, we say:

-- By saying: "*Solomon offered*", does not imply that he slaughtered those thousands of sacrifices by himself, but he presented them to be slaughtered. And we can say that the people partook of that procedure by presenting those sacrifices to the priests and the Levites; and God counted them as a gift from Solomon as a representative of all the people.

-- According to some, although the people could have taken part of the actual slaughtering, yet the priests have to scatter the blood, and put the lamb on the altar to be burnt.

-- According to the Jewish Historian Jusephus, in the days of Beron, Cestius asked the priests to count the number of the lambs that were sacrificed, who found them to be 250,000 lamb in a duration of three hours in the afternoon, whose blood was scattered on the altar.

-- According to others, the number of priests and Levites, was enough to present the sacrifices. In the time of king David, there were 38,000 Levites, over 30 years of age; and the number of priests was probably two or three thousands.

-- Those sacrifices were not offered in one day, but through the period of the two feasts (two weeks): the feast of the dedication of the temple, and the feast of the tabernacles.

"On the same day the king consecrated the middle of the court that was in front of the house of the Lord, for there he offered burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar that was

before the Lord was too small to receive the burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings” (63)

f- A feast of joy:

“At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt, before the Lord our God, seven days and seven more days. On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king, and went to their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord has done for His servant David, and for Israel His people” (65-66)

From Hamath in the north, most probably Syria, to the valley of Egypt south; namely, from the far north to the far south.

Solomon and all the leaderships, together with the people celebrated the dedication of the temple all along seven days, followed by seven days during which they celebrated the feast of the tabernacles; And on the eighth day he blessed the people and sent them away, exultant with joy.

The people not only found exalted joy in the house of the Lord, but they carried that joy with them to their homes to practice their whole life.

“They blessed the king”; namely, they prayed for his sake to the Lord to grant him His blessing, and to let His peace dwell on him; And that was how Solomon, likewise blessed the congregation. It was a mutual love between the leader and his people in the Lord.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 8

YOUR HOLY SPIRIT DEDICATES YOUR TEMPLE

- + The day Your temple is dedicated is a heavenly feast;
You rejoice in Your people, and Your people rejoice in You;
Solomon, the elders, the priests, and the people exulted;
They offered sacrifices beyond counting;
Your glory filled the house, that the priests could not stand for ministering;

- + Your Holy Spirit dedicates Your temple;
You rejoice in me and sanctifies me;
And I rejoice in You, and dedicate my life to You;
As a king, my will exults;
And my mind like the elders of the people;
And my feelings like the priests of the Most High;
And all my energies like the congregation of the Lord;
All the energies of my soul and my body will partake of presenting burnt offerings of love.

- + You promised to dwell in me, together with Your Holy Father;
That no cloud would fill my soul;
But Your Holy Spirit would fill my whole being;
Let me pray together with Solomon, saying:
May Your eyes be open on this house day and night;
To hear the prayer said by Your servant in this place;
From Your place in heaven, hear his prayer;
And if You hear, forgive;

- + Grant me a perfect heart;

To walk according to Your commandments; to Keep them, and they keep me;

May my whole life become a double feast for the dedication of my heart;

Let me return to my tent, exultant, and anticipating Your encounter face to face.

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CHAPTER 9

SOLOMON'S EXALTED KINGDOM

The era of king David, and of his son king Solomon, was considered the golden era in the Hebrew history. David was a warrior, and Solomon was fond of construction. David set the kingdom by his military strife, with a spirit of godliness; and Solomon built the temple, carried out commercial enterprises, and established a marine fleet.

The outer world at that time has been the era of 'Homer', the start of the Greek history, when Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon were all extremely weak; whereas the kingdom of Israel was strong and prosperous, with its sparkling capital – Jerusalem – embracing the temple that was considered the greatest building on earth at the time. Great men from all over the world came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and to see his glory.

The two chapters 9 and 10 came as an extension to chapter 4, that talked about Solomon's authority, wealth, and wisdom. Here, we see Solomon cares for trade and great public enterprises. We see him enter into dealings with the king of Sidon, to use his marine fleet for trade in the Mediterranean Sea; He built his own fleet of ships at 'Ezion Geber', and came to hold in his hand the south route through Edom to the coast of Arabia, India, and Africa. He set His kingdom and steadfast it by commercial work full of peace.

1- Solomon's second vision	1 -- 9
2- An exchange of gifts between Solomon and Hiram	10- - 14
3- Solomon's works and constructions	15 -- 23
4- Pharaoh's daughter in the city of David	16 -- 24
5- Offering annual sacrifices	25
6- Solomon's marine fleet	26 – 28

1- SOLOMON'S SECOND VISION:

“And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he wanted to do, that the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. And the Lord said to him: ‘I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me. I have sanctified this house which you have built to put My name there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually” (1-3)

Solomon built the temple, dedicating for building it all the possible energies and gifts, whether in Israel or in the Gentiles. He raised prayers, blessed the people, was blessed by the people; and celebrated together them. So far, it was the end of Solomon's work; But it was God who sanctified the house, and by His love received their gift. He appeared to Solomon a second time as He had appeared to him when he started his reign. He proclaimed his presence in the house by putting His name in it; revealed an important fact, that His eyes and His heart are in it. We therefore cannot sanctify ourselves, but it is God who sanctifies us as holy temples for Himself, proclaims His dwelling inside us, and that His eyes and heart are toward our depths; pours all His love in us, cares even for the number of hairs on our heads; and that we are wholly dedicated to Him.

It is the heart desire of every believer, and every true Theologian to be among those chosen who will enjoy seeing God in the eternal life, according to the proclamation by the apostle St. John, saying: *“We shall see Him as He is”* (1 John 3: 2); and yet in this same epistle, he says: *“No one has seen God at any time”* (1 John 4: 12). And the apostle Paul confirms, *“dwelling in an unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see”* (1 Timothy 6: 16).

While the Holy Book with its two testaments, confirms that man could never see the divine essence, we notice that the prophet Isaiah has enjoyed the divine presence (Isaiah 63: 9); that Jacob wrestled with God (Genesis 32: 24-30); that Moses spoke to God face to face, and the skin of his face shone by the splendor of the glory of God (Exodus 34: 29); And that the psalmist seeks from God to shine with His face on him (Psalm 4: 6; 31: 16; etc.); and in the New Testament in Romans 1: 19-20; 1 John 3: 1-2).

In the second half of the second century, Fr. Theophilus of Antioch sent to his heathen friend Autolychus three books in which he explains the Christian dogma; and in the first seven chapters of the first book, he proclaimed the possibility of seeing God. Being asked by his friend: Show me God, he talked to him of the eschatological proclamation, according to which man can see God, who, alone is not prone to death, when man bears non-corruption in his body, as well as in his soul. This eschatological vision has to be preceded and prepared for by a vision of faith, which man enjoys in this present life, when he bears an inner purity, through which he can see by his insight the unseen things:

[If you say: 'Show me your God', I shall respond, saying: 'Show me your man, and I shall show you my God'; ... Prove to me that the eyes of your soul are able to see, and the ears of your heart are able to hear; For God could be seen by those who are able to see Him; those whose souls' eyes are open. ... O man, the eyes of your soul have become blind by your sins and evil].

What does man see through the present vision of faith? ... He does not see mental meditations, nor expects seen visions; ... but – according to Fr..

Theophilus – he sees God through the works of His love, His care, and His ordinance of the whole creation, and of man himself. In other words, man does not encounter God to recognize His essence, nor to satisfy his mind with philosophical and theoretical theologies, but he encounter Him on a personal level; namely, he enters with Him in 'a personal experience with the Holy Trinity'.

[Do you say to me: Can you show me how God looks?

Hear this, O man! ... God's appearance is inexpressible; for it is not seen by the physical eyes.

In His glory, greatness, highness, He is unperceivable;

In power, in wisdom, and in goodness, He is incomparable;

And in compassion, He is unutterable

Calling Him is 'Light', I refer to His work;

Calling Him 'The Word', I refer to His authority.

Calling Him 'Mind', I refer to His wisdom.

Calling Him 'Spirit', I refer to His breath.

Calling Him 'Care', I refer to His goodness.

Calling Him 'kingdom', I refer to His glory.

Calling Him 'the Lord', I refer to Him as a Judge.

Calling Him 'the Judge', I refer to Him as 'Just'

Calling Him 'A Father', I refer to Him as the source of everything.

Calling Him 'Fire', I refer to His wrath].

"Now if You walk before Me as Your father David walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel'. But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for my name, I will cast out of My sight

. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruin, everyone who passes by it will be astonished, and will hiss and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?'" (5-8)

God warns them against apostasy from Him through denying faith, or disobeying His commandment, which would be a practical atheism, for which the punishment would be double.

(1) The people would be cut off from the Land that God has given them, which is a symbol of the heavenly Canaan, where it is not befitting of anyone defiled to dwell, or anything unclean to be found. So it would be natural for the holy land, not to receive whoever does not keep its sanctity, by God's work in him.

By His love, God called us to enter into the holy land – His church, His holy body. Whoever does not respond to the work of His Holy Spirit, will have himself cut off the church, even if he occupies a prominent place of leadership. Hence, according to the scholar Origen, there are many in the church who are actually outside it.

(2) He casts out of His sight the house which He has sanctified for His name; For the Holy One desires to have His people enjoy holiness to partake of His feature. He receives the house they have built to be a sanctuary for Him; Yet if that house loses its goal, which is the sanctification of the people of God, God will cast it out of His sight. What preoccupies God's mind is 'the holy people', living in a holy land, and practicing worship in a holy house.

That house, which was a magnificent example of glory; established upon a high mountain, testifying by its beauty and splendor to the presence of God

among His people; Now, with the people's rejection of the divine presence, it will be *"a proverb and a byword among all peoples"*. After being a climax in glory, it will become a climax in reproach. That was what God allowed for His house when the worshippers persisted on defilement; which actually happened in the days of 'Hezekiah' (2 Chronicles 29; Micah 6: 16), as warned by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 18: 16; 19: 18); when the temple was destroyed in the years 586/585 B.C. on the hands of the Babylonians. And when it was rebuilt in the days of Zerubbabel, and again in the days of Herod, it did not resume its prior glory

(3) Saying: *"According to all I have commanded you"*, In keeping the commandments with the uprightness of heart, We accept the whole law of Christ; We know no half way; We accept the new life with its spiritual heavenly law; We understand the secrets of the Old and the New Testaments and their statutes, not on the level of the deadly letter, but on that of the Spirit who edifies; By that we may say: *"Then I would not be ashamed when I look into all Your commandments"* (Psalm 119: 6).

+ As long as we say that the prophets are the ways, When we read the statutes, the laws, and the prophets, we would walk uprightly along the way in the Lord; We would understand and perceive His ways; And we would never be ashamed; when we have it our way to keep the commandments of God..

(The scholar Origen)

+ He who keeps one commandment and not another, would be betraying all the commandments, by insulting God who has provided and bound all of them together. For He who said: *"You shall not commit adultery"*, also said, *"You shall not steal"*. Therefore, if you steal, you would be breaking the

whole law. He who keeps all the commandments would not be ashamed on the awesome day of judgment.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

If disobedience of the commandment has brought our early parents into shame; when Adam said, *"I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself"* (Genesis 3: 10); The obedience of the Lord Christ on the cross has taken the curse away from the believers, cast the shame away, and opened the gates of paradise even before the repentant robber. He who disobeys the commandment enters into reproach and shame; and he who intends to obey them, completely and not partly, will reap the fruit of glory, be clothed in the wedding garment, and joyfully sing: *"Then I would not be ashamed when I look into all Your commandments"*. For the commandment is a bond with the divine Word who grants him splendor and glory before the Father, His angels, and His saints; and grants him awe, and dominion to trample upon the serpents and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy.

"Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, and worshipped them and served them; therefore the Lord has brought all this calamity on them'" (9)

According to 'Lactantius', these divine words are a prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple. And he also says: [Those things happened through God, because of the crucifixion of Christ, as previously proclaimed to Solomon; ... For what calamity, are those who crucified their Lord, who came for their salvation, unworthy of].

2- AN EXCHANGE OF GIFTS BETWEEN SOLOMON AND HIRAM: (10 – 14)

“Now it happened at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the Lord and the king’s house” (10)

Perceiving what his son will have of cleverness and ability to build, beside what the great possibilities he put at his disposal; David drew his son’s attention to the fact that human cleverness or material possibilities are not enough to consummate the building, but, *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it”* *Psalm 127: 1). David wrote this psalm to direct his son’s heart to God, for whom he is working to build His house; so as to make him keep his heart in the hands of God.

Starting the work, building the house of the Lord, leaning upon the divine arm, God accompanied him, not only in building the temple, but even in building his own house with all its annexes; Starting with what is God’s, God supported him in what is his own.

The order of building came to reveal the wisdom of Solomon:

- 1- The temple of the Lord; by which he presented the firstfruit of his constructive works to the account of the Lord Himself.
- 2- His royal house or palace, in which he felt a sense of stare stability.
- 3- The house of the Pharaoh’s daughter, namely, the wing of women, for familial stability.
- 4- The cities of storehouses to keep the produce and crops; and stables for the horses.
- 5- Resorts in Lebanon for the sake of his own pleasure of hunting and relaxation.

The order of construction came as such: The dwelling of God among His people; The state stability; the familial stability; the economic benefits; and the pleasure items.

“(Hiram the king of Tyre has supplied with cedar and cypress and gold as much as he desired), that king Solomon then gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee” (11)

In the fifth chapter we read about the treaty between Solomon and Hiram; Now this chapter reveals the fulfillment of that treaty in an atmosphere of friendship, love, openness, and fairness:

- a- On his side, Hiram fulfilled what he pledged of providing Solomon with everything he desired (11)
- b- Solomon gave Hiram twenty small cities in the land of Galilee (11).

It so seems that those cities were not within the portion of any of the tribes, but beyond the frontier of Asher (Joshua 19: 27); that remained in the hands of their inhabitants, until Solomon came, took them over, and gave them to Hiram (2 Samuel 24: 7); (who was not pleased with them)

It so seems that Solomon presented those cities, which, according to the Historian Josephus were located north-west of the land of Galilee, to Hiram, not to possess perpetually as a part of his kingdom, but to use as he desires until the wages of the workers are paid.

“Then Hiram went from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon has given him, but they did not please him. So he said, ‘What kind of cities are these which you have given me, my brother?’ And he called them the land of Cabul,

as they are to this day” (12-13)

According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, they were called ‘Cabul’, a Phoenician word meaning (fruitless); and were taken back later by Solomon from Hiram in exchange of specific gifts, probably plenty of agricultural crops; and were repaired and inhabited by Israelites.

Some may wonder, those twenty cities, presented by Solomon to Hiram, with which Hiram was not pleased, were they actually valueless; or was Hiram an opportunist trying to get a better bargain?. To this, according to some scholars, those cities were not valueless, nor Hiram was an opportunist; but although that land had its agricultural value, Hiram’s men of trade had no agricultural experience, nor had any desire to enter into that business. ... The way those who have a marine fleet, and wide international trade relationships, often wonder how can man be content in doing agricultural business like the inhabitants of Cabul were;. Likewise those working in agriculture, would never dream of confronting the risky and dangerous work on board ships however profitable it may be. ... God granted every man, as well as every people, what would bring them pleasure and comfort.

Finding that Hiram was not pleased with his gift, Solomon probably made it up for him by more plentiful agricultural crops, or paid the wages of his men in gold, after he finished his construction works.

It is obvious from the book of Joshua 19: 27, that there has been a province by the name of Cabul, a part of the promised land, on the border of the portion of the tribe Asher. That is why some translate the word, meaning (Frontier or border), as it came in the Septuagint version.

“Then Hiram sent the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold” (14)

It so seems that this sum was a loan from Hiram to king Solomon to help him consummate his projects beside the building of the temple, Although his father left much to him to build the temple, and Solomon collected more as annual tax from the nations submitted to him, yet his multitude of projects were so expensive that even his own people were heavily burdened as well:

- They offered gifts for building the temple
- They presented much of their own agricultural produce to pay wages to Hiram's men who partook of the work.
- They partook of the expenses of building the royal palace and its annexes.
- They partook of the expenses of building the king's storehouses and new cities.
- They partook of paying back the loan taken by Solomon from Hiram.
- They partook of paying back the wages of Hiram's men, when he was not pleased with the twenty cities given to him by Solomon.

3- SOLOMON'S WORKS AND CONSTRUCTIONS: (15 – 23)

“And this is the reason for the labor force which king Solomon raised: to build the house of the Lord, his own house, the Millo, the walls of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer” (15)

As the walls of the city of David, namely, His Millo or stronghold (2 Samuel 5: 9; 1 Chronicles 11: 8), have deteriorated after about 50 years of its building, Solomon was committed to renew them (1 Kings 11: 27).

Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer were of the most important locations in the promised land:

Gezer: a Hebrew name, meaning, (portion, or the bride's dowry), the name of a Canaanite old city whose history goes back to nearly 3000 years; about 18 miles west of Jerusalem; a prominent city, a connecting center to Egypt, because of its location on the route to Jaffa, and of a very important strategic position on the route to Maris, the main route that connects between Egypt and Mesopotamia, close to Lechich, to the lower Beth Horon (Joshua 10: 33; 16: 3), and to Tell Jezer; Known nowadays as 'Abu Shusha'. It was never defeated by the Israelites, was never without its original inhabitants, who seem to have some kind of independence, till the days of Solomon; was a portion of the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chronicles 7: 28); then was chosen as a city of the Levites (Joshua 21: 1-21; 1 Chronicles 6: 27)..

It was taken over by the Philistines (2 Samuel 5: 25; 1 Chronicles 20: 4); and by the Pharaoh of Egypt who presented it as a dowry to his daughter when she was married to king Solomon (1 Kings 9: 16); which was a custom among kings that the father of the bride presents a city as a dowry for his daughter married to another king.

And being located on a public route from Jaffa to Jerusalem and Gibeon, it had to be fortified, which was done by king Solomon, who made it a military and commercial center (9: 15, 16). It was an important stronghold in the Jewish wars; was destroyed by the Assyrians; fortified by the Maccabees during their wars (1 Kings 9: 52), and was taken over by Simon the Maccabee after besieging it.

“(Pharaoh king of Egypt has gone up and taken Gezer and burnt it with fire, had killed the Canaanites who dwelt in

the city, and had given it as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife (16)

“And Solomon built Gezer, Lower Beth Horon, Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land of Judah” (17-18)

As **Beth Horon** or Beit Vr. Tachta, also had a prominent location like Gezer, it had to be fortified.

Tadmor, well known by many scholars as the same city known by the name 'Palmyra'; on account of that the word 'Tadmor' is derived from the word (Tamr, Tamor, or Tamar), namely, (dates) in both Arabic and Hebrew languages.. After taking it over, Alexander the Great called it 'Palmyra', namely, (the city of Palms). Its remains is full of pillars, temples, decorated tombs, and the great temple of the sun.

A very old city in the desert, has been one of the most beautiful cities in the world, south of Judea (Ezekiel 47: 19; 48: 28); 140 miles, north-east of Damascus, and 120 miles west of the River Euphrates. The remains of Palmyra, extending nowadays about a mile and a half, reveal the greatness and exaltation of Solomon; like a fertile oasis, surrounded by barren desert on all sides.

The modern village of Tadmor, within the walls of the great temple of the sun, and its remains, no place is equal to it in width and beauty, in all Syria, except for Baalbak; its rich supply of water runs below it in old tunnels, and its greatest springs run in a natural channel beneath the mountain south of the city. Most of its tombs are outside the city, tops in craftsmanship, and some of them are built in the shape of towers, and include mummies like those in the tombs of Egypt. The city was full of statutes.

Located between Syria and Mesopotamia, it had its commercial importance before the days of Solomon, who fortified it, for commercial interest, and to be a defense stronghold against any attack from north Asia.

According to John of Antioch, Nebuchadnezzar, on his way to put Jerusalem under siege, destroyed the city.

The discoveries by the University of Chicago concerning **Megiddo**, reveal a region filled with the remains of stables since the days of Solomon. Such a stable has been very extensive, could accommodate between 300 and 500 horses. At the end of the detailed description of those stables, Wood, and Dawkes, said that the world has never seen a more glorified and haughtier city in the old and contemporary eras, not only as far as its buildings and location are concerned, but concerning the celebrities who graduated from it, like Longinus, and queen Zenobia (Zeinab, or Zabaa), who made it the capital of her kingdom , before Oris destroyed it in the year 273 B.C.

Baalath (Bata), a Samite name, meaning (a lady), a city within the portion of Dan (Joshua 19: 44), its location is unknown now, although, according to some, it was south of Palestine, close to Shepelah (2 Chronicles 8: 5), called by the name 'Aver, On' (Amos 1: 5); And according to Josephus, it was not far from Gezer, and it was therefore, not Baalbak.

“And all the storage cities that Solomon had, cities for his chariots, and cities for his cavalry, and whatever Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in the land of his dominion” (19)

The storage cities were specially built to put in them in the food provisions of the state, construction materials, and military equipments. They were signs of the wealth of the country, its economic prosperity, its military might, and political glory. Those cities were for the storage of the provisions of the army, most probably in the north (2 Chronicles 8: 4; 16: 4); and for the provisions of men of the state, at the times of affliction (2 Chronicles 17: 12; 32: 28); the way Pharaoh built storage cities in the land of Gasaan (Exodus 1: 11). Located on the commercial routes, they were also used to support the travelers and their beasts of burden.

Israel was divided into 12 sections, each of which had to provide a portion of the provisions to Jerusalem, or to the royal palace; which was not directly done, but through the storage cities.

The Israelites, as slaves, built storage cities in Egypt, like Phethom and Raamses (Exodus 1: 11). Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, likewise, built storage cities during the reigns

Saying: “*And whatever Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in the land of his dominion*”, reveals how difficult it was to count the multitude of constructions done by the king.

“All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, who were not of the children of Israel, that is their descendants who were left in the land after them, whom the children of Israel had not been able to destroy completely – from those Solomon raised forced labor, as it is to this day. But of the children of Israel Solomon made no forced labor, because they were men of war and his servants, his officers, his captains, commanders of his chariots, and his cavalry” (20 – 22)

Once Sesostris, king of Egypt, came back from war, he built several temples all over Egypt, using in their building not a single Egyptian citizen, but the captives of war. And on the walls of every temple the words: [No Egyptian citizen worked in building this temple] were inscribed. It so seems that Solomon did the same in his establishments.

Hiring 30,000 Israelites for a period of one month, followed by two months rest, was not counted as forced labor, nor servitude; as all what preoccupied

Solomon's heart was to let his people live in a spirit of freedom, to have from them men of war, princes, civil, and military leaders.

"Others were chiefs of the officials who were over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people who did the work" (23).

4- PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER IN THE CITY OF DAVID: (24 – 26)

"But Pharaoh's daughter came up from the city of David to her house which Solomon has built for her. Then he built the Millo" (24)

Solomon did not feel comfortable about having Pharaoh's daughter living in David's house on Mount Zion, very close to the temple. For he considered the location of the temple as being a holy place, on account of the presence of the ark of the Lord in it. His own house was on the other side of the mount, probably opposite to the temple, separated by Tyropoeum Valley.

5- OFFERING ANNUAL SACRIFICES: (25)

"Now, three times a year, Solomon offered burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar which he had built for the Lord, and he burned incense with them on the altar that was before the Lord. So he finished the temple" (25)

Solomon was keen on offering burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord, three times a year; namely, on the major feasts of the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Tabernacles, beside the sacrifices he kept on offering every now and then. He did not stop at building the temple and the altar, but he felt the need for the sacrifice to realize the reconciliation with God. The living spiritual leader, beside the ministry of others, does not disregard his own need for ministry.

After building the temple, no more sacrifices were offered on the high places (1 Kings 3: 2). Now, Solomon offers burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar which he built for the Lord, three times a year.

“So he finished the temple” The building was consummated, not by stones, wood, costly furniture, of gold, silver, and bronze, but by the continuous offering of sacrifices; for that work would only be consummated by the divine presence among the people; which could not be realized except through offering the sacrifice.

6- SOLOMON’S MARINE FLEET: (26 – 28)

“King Solomon also built a fleet of ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom” (26)

Solomon built this fleet for trade with Arabia, India, and the eastern coast of Africa. Ezion Geber is located at the far end of the Gulf of Aqaba in the Red Sea. Beside their remains discovered by Dr. Nelson Glueck of the American School of eastern studies: there were remains of metal furnaces, crucibles, refinery labs, and storehouses of bronze and iron; and close to them were diverse products of nails, arrow heads, fish hooks, etc.

“Then Hiram sent his servants with the fleet, seamen who knew the sea, to work with the servants of Solomon” (27)

Hiram sent his servants who had experience in ship-building and navigation, which the Israelites lacked at that time. At Ezion Geber the men of Tyre built the ships,

The commercial relationships between the southern coast of Arabia, and India was very old, going back to pre-Solomon era. Whereas through the relationships

between Arabia and the opposite coast of Ethiopia, the African produce reached Arabia; and is therefore, much older than that between Arabia and India.

“An they went to Ophir and acquired 420 talents of gold from there, and brought it to king Solomon” (28)

The literal translation of verse 26 indicate that it was only one commercial ship that Solomon built, rather than a whole fleet.

The trade with Ophir was probably stable before, whether on the hands of the Phoenicians or the Egyptians. And when Solomon decided to partake of that trade, Egypt already had her fleet in the other arm of the Red Sea that extended to the southern regions since long time.

Ophir the name of land called after the son of Jactan who settled down in south Arabia, (Yemen nowadays), whose name came together with Havilah and Jobabs (Genesis 10: 29). That region was famed for gold (1 Chronicles 29: 4; Job 22: 24; 28: 16; Psalm 45: 9; Isaiah 13: 12).

Solomon and Hiram sent a commercial fleet from Ezion Geber on the Gulf of Aqaba to Ophir, which brought forth gold, almug wood, and precious stones (9: 26-28; 10: 11).

According to some, Ophir was located on the eastern coast of Africa, or in India beyond the River Ganges; But most probably it was in Yemen, close to the land of the Cebians. While, according to others, the name ‘Ophir’ was generally given to the southern regions of the seas of Africa, Arabia, and India, according to others it concerns those of Ceylon.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 9

GRANT ME, O LORD, TO SEE YOU

- + Solomon enjoyed seeing You twice:
In Gibeon, when he became king;
And after the temple was built.
Grant me to see You, since You have set me a king;
And Your Holy Spirit sanctifies my depths a dwelling place for You.
Let Your eyes and heart be in my depths, all the days of my sojourn;
For You are my gladness, righteousness, and sanctification.
- + Your transfiguration in me teaches me to be friendly with my brethren;
To deal with love, together with openness with my brethren; As Solomon
was with Hiram;
- + Appear to me, for all my energies build Your house in me;
Solomon used forced labor from all nations around him;
They all worked in submission;
- + Your appearance to him encouraged him to build his commercial fleet;
All what his hands stretched to do was successful;
You are the secret of my success.

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CHAPTER 10

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA ADMIRES THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

The previous chapters showed the stability of Solomon's kingdom, and his care of construction work, starting with the house of the Lord and its annexes; his own house and its annexes; Pharaoh's daughter's house; then the storage cities, and finally establishment for the sake of his own pleasure. Yet, we hear nothing of his care for building establishments for the welfare of his people, like hospitals, orphanages, or schools, nor of his care for the proper upbringing of his own son 'Rehoboam' the crown prince.

The present chapter showed the greatness of Solomon; as testified by the queen of Sheba, who said that what she saw by her own eyes surpassed what she heard about him:

- **His great riches:** The queen of Sheba, as well as the kings of the nations around him, presented to him plenty of gold, spices, and precious stones.
- **His great generosity:** As much as he got, he also gave.
- **His great appearance:** Shields of gold, cups of gold, and a uniquely great throne.
- **His great power:** A multitude of horse-driven chariots (26).
- **His great commercial abilities:** Commercial deals with Egypt (28, 29)
- The **great riches of his people** (27).

Putting all these things together, we may say that Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom; Yet he was just a shadow of Christ who said about himself: *“Indeed a greater than Solomon is here”* (Matthew 12: 42; Luke 11: 31).

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|------------------------------------|---------|
| 1- The visit of the queen of Sheba | 1 - 13 |
| 2- The riches of Solomon | 14 – 29 |

1- THE VISIT OF THE QUEEN OF SHEBA: (1 – 13)

The queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon to see and touch what she heard about him. She gave him a multitude of precious gifts. And when she tested him with questions which he answered profusely, she revealed her admiration of his wisdom, and achievements, and blessed the Lord his God who set such a king on his people.

“When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions” (1)

Some wonder whether the queen of Sheba was Ethiopian, Arab, or Indian; as each of these countries has a certain tradition by which they bind her with their history; taking into consideration that reigning queens were common in all those regions.

The Lord Christ called her “Queen of the south”, on account of that Sheba was south of Canaan. It is now a common knowledge that Sheba is in Africa. And the Ethiopians believe that the queen of Sheba came from their country, and that ‘Candace’ (Acts 8: 27) was her successor.

According to others she was from Yemen for the following reasons:

-- The Arabian Sheba has been famous for spices in the old world, and rich in the mines of gold, silver, and precious stones.

-- The Arabian Sheba has been an important kingdom, whereas the Ethiopian Sheba has been no more than a city.

-- As 'Ophir' has been in Arabia, that would be an extra reason to consider Sheba in the same region; For through Solomon's trade with Ophir,

his news were widely distributed, and eventually came to the knowledge of the queen of Sheba.

Yet, according to some scholars, Sheba has been an independent kingdom, whose inhabitants were a mixture of Ethiopians and Arabs.

"Concerning the name of the Lord". (1). With Solomon's many gifts, like uttering proverbs, songs; his military and political talents, and his artistic taste in construction, Yet his prominent fame has been *"concerning the glory of the name of the Lord"*; In other words, he was well known as the godly man of the Lord.

What was the motive of the queen of Sheba to come in such *"a very great retinue"*, crossing such a great distance to see Solomon?! ... Having his name bound to the name of God, She came to test him with hard questions, to know what his God whom he worship, may mean to her. God responded to Solomon's prayer, that foreign peoples would come from far countries to God's house, for the sake of His name (1 Kings 8: 41-43).

As it was the custom of kings in the old world to visit one another to see and test their possibilities and ordinances in running their countries, the queen of Sheba, hearing much about Solomon, which she thought beyond imagination, came by herself to Jerusalem to test him by hard questions. And having got convincing answers to her questions, she perceived his exalted wisdom, and blessed God who set Solomon king, and granted him such righteousness.(9).

Has the queen of Sheba come to believe in Solomon's God. All we know is that the Lord Christ talked about her and the people of Ninevah, as two living examples of receiving, and responding to the Living God in the old covenant (Luke 11: 29-32).

"She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels that bore spices, with much gold and precious stones, and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart" (2)

Coming with a very great retinue of camels confirms that Sheba was not in India, as some assumed; for it would not be possible for such a huge caravan to come all the way from India. And camels were the main way of transport in Arabia.

The queen of Sheba did not send a delegation to explore the person of Solomon, but came by herself, bearing much gold, precious stones, and spices, to enjoy listening to wisdom from Solomon's mouth. ... And here is the Wisdom of God, He who is greater than Solomon, intends to grant us Himself freely to bear in us; ... And yet, we often flee away from Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

On Solomon's side, he did not rebuke her for forsaking her country's affairs, and enduring the troubles of such a long journey, but welcomed her gave her the opportunity to tell him all what was in her heart; and responded to all her questions, whether natural, behavioral, political, or religious..

"So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her" (3)

According to the Historian Josephus, she did not pose philosophical questions, nor entered into religious or ethical debates, but presented to Solomon riddles which peoples of the East used to have, and still have to this day; the way it happened with Samson (Judges 14: 12-14); and as mentioned in the 'Telmud', of the stories and riddles told by the queen of Sheba to Solomon.

It so came that to whatever riddle told by the queen of Sheba, Solomon, by his wisdom responded, and quickly solved; And finally, she presented to him a bunch of artificial beautiful flowers, so cleverly made that it is almost impossible to know that they are not natural flowers; and together with them she presented to the king a bunch of completely identical natural flowers.

Those present in the king's audience were first confused, for it was impossible to distinguish the natural from the artificial flowers, particularly when they saw the king for the first time pause a little while. They were silent for fear lest their king would fail; to have a great surprise, when the king requested a swarm of bees, and released them toward the two bunches of flowers, to see them go directly to the natural ones to suck their nectar, disregarding the artificial ones. Then the queen of Sheba and the audience applauded Solomon's wisdom and quick mind.

"And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon and the house he had built, ..." (4)

According to the Jews, the term 'wisdom' (chaakmat), implies a wide range of mental gifts and reason; both theoretical and practical knowledge, which was demonstrated in Solomon's ordinance of the affairs of his kingdom and his royal palace, beside his enjoyment of a flood of wealth as a result of a multitude of international commercial relationships with different countries; his wisdom in building the temple, and managing the system of ministry in it; his artistic and literate gifts, his care for the collective worship, and offering sacrifices to God in the name of the whole people.

"The food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cupbearers and

his entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her. Then she said to the king:

'It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the

words until I came and saw it with my own eyes, indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity

exceed the fame of which I heard'" (5-7)

"The entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord" , probably refers to that there was a private way by which the king used to go from his palace to the western hill across a little valley going down then up to the eastern hill, where the western side of the temple region was.

"There was no more spirit in her". She was so impressed that she almost fainted. Having assumed that there was much exaggeration in what she heard, she now realizes that the report presented half the truth. What impressed her most was not what she heard, out of the king's lips, as much as what she saw by her own eyes of his works. She commended him for his wisdom, and for what his practical life showed of goodness and godliness; of how his knowledge mixed with his practical behavior, and how his concepts were interpreted by his way of life.

The queen of Sheba glorified the God of Israel, not that she has forsaken the gods she worshipped, but she added the true God to the other gods she revered. Although some Jewish scholars believe that she entered into the Jewish faith, and worshipped the living God, influenced by Solomon; yet other scholars dismiss this idea, on account of that we have no proof that she offered any sacrifices or gifts to the temple; All her gifts were to the king; as a sign of friendship, on the personal level, as well as on that between the two countries.

According to 'Strabo', the people of Sheba were so rich that they used gold and silver, in an exaggerate way in their furniture, and as decoration on the walls, doors, and ceilings of their houses.

"Happy are your men, and happy are these your servants who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom" (8)

The queen blessed the servants who stand continually before the king and hear his wisdom, for by serving him they partake of his blessed and happy life. ... So are they who live together with the God of Solomon in His house, and who minister to His kingdom, for they enjoy the fellowship of life with Him, to live blessed, namely, to partake of His heavenly life.

"Blessed be the Lord your God who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel. Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore, He made you king, to do justice and righteousness" (9)

The queen of Sheba did not come to make commercial nor political relationships, but came to test what she heard of Solomon's wisdom. As the kings of Sheba were priests (Psalm 72: 10); that queen who was probably a priestess, returned to her country testifying to the true God. After blessing Solomon and those standing before him, and his servants who serve him, she blessed the Lord who granted Solomon the kingdom, beside wisdom, riches and glory.

Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, spices in great abundance, and precious stones. There never again came such abundance of spices, as the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon" (10)

King David previously prophesied that Solomon will have the gold of Sheba (Psalm 22: 15). Those gifts of gold, spices, and precious stones were a shadow of the gifts to be given by the Magi to the newborn of Bethlehem (Matthew 2: 11). The queen presented the gifts as a price for the wisdom she heard from Solomon, not knowing that what she did was a shadow of what will happen later on when the true Son of David will be born..

The queen of Sheba as a symbol of the church of the new covenant:

- 1- She heard and believed. Faith is therefore comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10: 17); She believed and confessed (7; 6; Luke 18: 13).
- 2- She heard, then sought to encounter with Solomon, the symbol of Christ. She did not reject the invitation to the wedding (Matthew 22: 5); nor postponed the encounter, the way 'Felix' did (Acts 24: 25).
- 3- She entered into a debate with the king, who hid nothing from her (3, 2).
- 4- She encountered the king with a spirit of humility (4, 5).
- 5- Getting to know him, she admired him, the way the church did, when admiring the Lord Christ, she cried-out, saying: "*You are fairer than the sons of men*" (Psalm 45: 2); And as St. Augustine says:
He is beautiful in heavens, being the Word with God;
He was beautiful on earth while clothed in human nature;
He was beautiful in His mother's womb, and beautiful on His parents' arms.
He was beautiful in His miracles, as He was beautiful when scourged.
He was beautiful in being given life, as He was beautiful in not refusing to die.
He was beautiful in giving Himself up, as He was beautiful in taking it on again.
He was beautiful on the cross, beautiful in the grave, and beautiful in returning to heaven.

And according to St. Jerome: [His divinity, with its splendor and greatness, was hidden under the veil of the body; and radiated upon His bodily features, to captivate all those who were fortunate enough to look at it].

- 6- Solomon realized all her heart's desire (13; John 6: 37).
- 7- She tested and commended him (8, 9; Psalm 107: 2).
- 8- She presented gold to the king (10)
- 9- The Lord Christ testified to her, and commended her (Matthew 12: 42)

“Also the ships of Hiram which brought gold from Ophir brought great quantities of Almug wood and precious stones from Ophir” (11)

According to some, the ‘Almug wood’ is the ‘sandal wood’, famed for its nice fragrance; and according to others, it is ‘Deodar’ (desdara-cedras), used in the important holy works. This kind of wood is very heavy and solid, with nice red color, called ‘valguka’ in the Sankrit language, and ‘Almug’ in the Phoenician

“And the king made steps of the almug wood for the house of the Lord and for the king’s house, also harps and stringed instruments for singers. There never again came such almug wood, nor has the like been seen to this day” (12)

The Jewish harp ‘kinnowr’ is triangle in shape with 10 strings, analogous to the ancient Assyrian harp.

The stringed instrument ‘nebel’ on which the musician plays with his fingers, was probably the ‘lyre’, guitar-like, like the one inscribed on the Hebrew coin, with a hollow body, like a pitcher at its lower part.

“And king Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all she desired, whatever she asked, besides what Solomon has

given her according to the royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants” (13)

It so seems that Solomon lacked nothing: he had wisdom from heaven, peace on his land, abundant riches, and international fame.

He gave her all what she asked for, freely, as a sign of an intimate friendship between their two countries. And according to some, as a part of what she desired, was to have a son from him, which she did have, as a son called ‘Menilek’, raised in the Israeli royal palace, succeeded his mother on the throne of Sheba, and drew his men to the Jewish faith.

“The weight of the gold that came to Solomon yearly, was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold; besides that from the traveling merchants, from the income of traders; from all the kings of Arabia, and from the governors of the country” (14-15)

Beside that huge quantity of gold, Solomon had other sources:

-- Beside an annual income, and gifts without limit (10; 10-22), he had golden shields, all his cups were in gold, and his ivory throne was overlaid with gold. After the death of Solomon, ‘Shishak’, king of Egypt confiscated all that gold (14: 25, 26; 2 Chronicles 9: 12, 12; 2-11); And in the year 1939, his mummy, was discovered in Tanis, Egypt, in a sarcophagus with a golden cover, most probably the same gold he took after the death of king Solomon.

-- The multitude of gifts, presented to him by the traders of the countries he submitted, in a form of taxes they had to pay.

-- The benefits of his commercial partnership with Hiram, king of Tyre.

-- Kings of the surrounding countries used to visit him for the sake of his wisdom, seeking his political and economic counsel, and gave him gifts.

-- His marriage to the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt, and his care to purchase chariots and horses, created an exchange of commercial deals between the two countries; the Egyptians provided him with everything he needed for great discount for the sake of his Egyptian wife.

"The kings of Arabia" , probably tribes of a mixture of Jews and Arabs who dwelt in the western desert (Jeremiah 25: 24)

"And king Solomon made two hundred large shield of hammered gold; six hundred shekels of gold went into each shield" (16

The shield, which was usually made of wood, covered with leather, to protect man's breast, was made by Solomon of gold;

The custom of hanging the shields on the outer walls for decoration has been common in Tyre (Ezekiel 11; 2: 10), as well as in Rome, Athens, etc.

"He also made 300 shields of hammered gold, three minas of gold went into each shield; and the king put them

in the house of the forest of Lebanon. Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory, and covered it with pure gold" (17, 18)

The throne was probably made of wood, covered with a layer of ivory; with the two hands and the back of ivory; the way we see in the Egyptian and the Assyrian temples.

The throne had six steps; and the top of the throne was round at the back; there were armrests on either sides of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests” (19)

As he set himself a stronghold for everyone oppressed, to defend as though with a shield; So Solomon cared for the throne of judgment. He found pleasure in realizing justice among his people.

“He covered it with pure gold”. Solomon did not collect gold to store it, but used it for the house of the Lord, for his own house, and for his personal use (Ecclesiastes 5: 19); either to overlay the wood and ivory, or to adorn them with engraved items of gold.

He made 200 large shields, and 300 shields; but he did not make swords nor spears. The Roman emperors used to have their processions preceded by men carrying sticks and axes, as a reference to their authority of punishing the wicked; Solomon, on the other hand, cared for making large shields and shields as defense and offense tools of war, proclaiming his role as a defender of every godly oppressed, and found pleasure in being a stronghold of the righteous.

“Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps; nothing like that had been made for any other kingdom” (20)

The lions standing on the steps refer to the commitment of all the twelve tribes of Israel to be filled with courage and strength in the truth; representing a procession of lions who flatter nobody, and fear no one.

According to some they were bulls and not lions; which, either way, it would be a shadow of heathen worship; the way the thrones of Assyrian and Egyptian kings were adorned by animals.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Solomon's throne had a golden bull or ox, with its head directed toward its shoulder; the lion referred to Judah, and the bull or ox refers to Ephraim (Hosea 4: 16; 19: 11; Jeremiah 31: 18 etc.).

"All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold; and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; not one was of silver, for this was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon" (21)

As Solomon and all his men used to drink of cups of gold, and not of silver, So the Lord Christ grants His riches to His people to enjoy the heavenly drink (the gold).

For the king had merchant ships at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the merchant ships came bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys" (22).

- + The merchant ships of Tarshish, namely the spiritual ships, that carry the gold and silver of Solomon, are our bodies that carry a treasure in an earthen vessel, according to the words of the apostle (2 Corinthians 4: 7)

(St. Ambrose)

"So king Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart" (23-24)

Solomon translated the wisdom he got as a divine gift into work, shown in his amazing ability in the political ordinance of the state affairs, as well as in setting a

local system of internal ordinance in such an extensive kingdom; beside his exalted military and construction achievements.

“Each man brought his present: articles of gold and silver, garments, armor, spices, horses, and mules, at a set rate, year by year” (25)

By “present” here, he means (tax). The Egyptian and Assyrian temples, portray carriers of taxes, coming to kings in submission, presenting precious products, as representatives of their countries.

The custom of presenting gifts, even in regular visits, between individuals or families, are still essential in certain eastern societies.

“And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen, he had one thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem” (26)

Here the author speaks about the stables of Solomon’s horses (10: 26, 28). The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago revealed the remains of the city Megiddo, one of the cities where ruins of those stables were found.

Two things in which, Solomon, and his father David disregarded the law of the Lord, and broke the commandment saying: *“Neither shall he (the king of Israel) multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself; nor shall he multiply horses for himself”* (Deuteronomy 16: 16, 17).

+ In the Holy Scripture, it is written: *“A horse is a vain hope for safety”* (Psalm 33: 17); *“The horse and its rider, He has thrown into the sea”* (Exodus 15: 1); God’s commandment to the king of Israel that *“not to*

multiply horses for himself” (Deuteronomy 16: 17); and, “Everyone neighed after his neighbor’s wife” (Jeremiah 5: 8).

(St. Jerome)

“The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowlands” (27)

Until a recent time the huge sycamore trees were so abundant in the streets of Upper Egypt; on which anyone could climb and help himself from its fruits which were free and priceless.

“And Solomon had horses imported from Egypt and keveh; the king’s merchants brought them from Keveh at the current price” (28)

It is claimed that the Egyptians were the first people to use horses in war. And the peoples who used horses in war were mightier than those without that experience.

According to the Jewish and Christian Ethiopians, psalm 45 is a prophecy about the journey of the queen of Sheba to Jerusalem; accompanied by the daughter of Hiram, king of Tyre; And that the last part of the psalm proclaims the son conceived by the queen of Sheba from Solomon. After living with his mother for several years, she sent him to his father Solomon to raise him; which he did, and anointed him a king over Ethiopia in the temple of Jerusalem, calling him by the name of his grandfather David. The young king returned to his country ‘Seba’ or ‘Azab’, together with a group of twelve Jewish Rabbis, scholars in the law of Moses, one from each tribe, whom he appointed judges in his kingdom; and of whom were three who were perpetually in the presence of the king.

The queen died after reigning for forty years, in the year 986 B. C. and was succeeded by Menilek; as testified by scholars, whether friends or enemies of Ethiopia; albeit they differed concerning the queen's name.

*"Now a chariot that was imported from Egypt cost six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse one hundred and fifty;
and thus, through their agents, they exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria" (29).*

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 10

LET ME ENCOUNTER YOU TOGETHER WITH THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

- + The queen of Sheba came in a great procession to Jerusalem;
Her camels carried exalted spices, abundant gold, and precious stones;
Let me approach You together with her;
Let me, with the procession of love, cross over with her toward the higher Jerusalem;
Let me, together with the Marys, present to You unique spices;
And carry to You my gold and precious stones;
From what is Yours, let me present to You, O Grantor of all gifts.
- + The queen of Sheba was impressed by the person of Solomon;
She was captivated by his wisdom and by everything concerning him;
And to You, Greater than Solomon,
I present all what I have, to listen to Your voice;
I would forsake every earthly throne and sit at Your footstool;

To seek unity and fellowship with You;

- + I will give You of what is Yours with no limits;
And You will give me my heart's desire;
Granting me Yourself, I would have everything.

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SOLOMON'S DOWNFALL AND DEATH

Here, the Holy Book presents to us a very painful narrative; that of the downfall of Solomon's personality; Its summary, as referred to by the Holy Book after several centuries (Nehemiah 13: 26). is that, because of the seduction of his foreign wives, he apostatized from the true pure worship; Solomon, who dedicated his heart to the love of God, turned it to the foreign women. He, who started by caring for his people by love, got preoccupied with his own palace, and his huge establishments, and burdened his people with high taxes and forced labor.

Feeling the enormity of such serious and extreme turn from a king who dedicated the energies of his people to the account of the kingdom of God, and who was internationally famed for wisdom and godliness, to someone sunk in carnal lusts, and idol-worship, Some scholars believed that there are exaggeration in what was told about him, whether on the aspect of godliness or that of wickedness. According to some, it would be impossible for Solomon to turn over to such a horrible portrait, after enjoying such exalted splendor.

It is a great lesson which practically shows the possibility of diversion and corruption, under any circumstances, and at any age, whatever are the believer's past experience, works, possibilities or wisdom.

Bathsheba played a wise and important role in the enthronement of her son Solomon, and in opposing the plot of Adonijah his brother. And she provided her son with counsels that would support him in his reign; particularly warning him against marrying heathen foreign women (Proverb 31: 3); which he unfortunately did not heed.

Having touched by himself what dwelt upon his father David and all his family, as a consequence of falling into covetousness, Solomon did not benefit from such a serious lesson.

The last chapter mentioned how Solomon disobeyed the divine commandment to the kings, concerning not to multiply horses (Deuteronomy 17: 16), nor gold and silver for themselves. Now, this chapter reveals Solomon's disregard of the divine commandment not to be bound in marriage to foreign heathen women.

So the Holy Book introduced to us the person of Solomon, as a serious example of falling down after enjoying heavenly wisdom, glory, and greatness. Going through the serious experience of being bound to heathen women, Solomon provided us in his book of proverbs with the fact that the love of such women *"has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men"* (proverb 7: 26)

The heathen women:

Through practical experience, king Solomon warns us in chapters 5 to 7 of his book of proverbs, against the snares of the heathen woman, whose voice is smoother than oil.

He who inclines his inner ears to the voice of the deceptive adulteress, with its apparent sweetness, will not be able to incline them to the voice of wisdom. The first book of the kings gives us the bitter narrative of Solomon himself, who, having inclined his ears to the foreign women, he lost the kingdom of God that was in his depths. *"King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh ... When he was old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David; ... Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord as did his father David"* (1 kings 11: 1-6).

The Sage seeks from us to avoid anything that may draw us to the sin of adultery; or may even incline toward it through the mind; as the covetous thoughts are deadly to all the seeds of virtue; and those who fall into their snares, will be close to the gates of the pit. If the lips of the believer who listens to the voice of wisdom, utter knowledge, *"the lips of an amoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil. But in the end she is bitter*

as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword" (Proverb 5: 3-4). The lips and mouth here, probably refer to the kisses that stir up evil, together with the deceptive emotional words.

- + Someone gives the following counsel: [Don't look at the beauty of the foreign woman; and avoid the encounter of an adulteress; ... The adulteress does not know how to love, but knows how to hunt; her kisses are full of poison, and her mouth is full of a harmful narcotic; although its effect may linger for a while, for she hides her deadly destruction, and does not let it be apparent from the start.
- + I know that the features of the adulteress may seem acceptable; For the Book says: *"The lips of the foreign woman drip honey"*. That is why I try hard not to let you experience this honey, which will soon turn into bitter wormwood; which, according to the Holy Book: *"It may be smooth as oil to your throat, but, in the end will be as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword"*.

(St. John Chrysostom)

CHAPTER 11

SOLOMON'S WOMEN AND HIS APOSTASY

Solomon seems to have surpassed his father David in a number of aspects: He sought from God the wisdom, and did not seek glory nor riches;
He built the temple that his father longed to build; By the extension of his kingdom, the divine promise to Abraham was fulfilled; Peace prevailed on his kingdom, that enjoyed a good, and well-organized system of reign; And he had got great riches and glory.

Yet, on that exalted kingdom, a serious dark cloud of sin eventually prevailed; namely, the king's marriage to heathen women, most of whom were the daughters of foreign princes. By falling into such political marriages, Solomon committed a crime in the sight of the Lord his God, against his own people, and himself, as his heart turned away from God (1 kings 11: 1-8). It was the custom between nations, that a weak king gives one of his beautiful daughters, or women, in marriages, to a strong king; to assure having some kind of intimacy, and hence of peace and security; and a sort of guarantee that the strong king would never have an intention of animosity against him. It was known as a 'peace offering'.

Solomon fell into that custom to appease men, at the expense of his relationship with God. He took for himself heathen women as wives and concubines, from the surrounding nations, to have favor in the sight of the non-believers, at the expense of his faith and spiritual life. And having been famous on the level of the whole world at that time, he had 700 wives, and 300 concubines. In the East, the greatness of a king was measured according to the number of wives and concubines he has in the women's wing. Hence, according to some, Solomon's greatest sin was not his carnal lust, as much as it was his desire for greatness; although the later drew him to fell into the former, as well as into idol-worship.

He who built the great temple, stretched his hand to build altars for idols. The idol-worship which king David did much to uproot, was brought back by his son Solomon, even in his own royal palace. It is as though the same hand that God used to set a golden era, stretched to destroy that glory.

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1- SOLOMON ATTACHMENT TO HEATHEN WOMEN: (1 – 3)

“But king Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh; women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites” (1)

Solomon's enjoyment of the exalted heavenly wisdom, did not commit him to godly life; for, by his own free will, he diverted to serious faults, and sins, corruptive to faith. On him applies the divine words, said to the angel 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”* (Revelation 3: 17); And the words of the apostle Paul to the Galatians: *“Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”* (Galatians 3: 3).

In a certain tradition, it came that Solomon married the daughter of Hiram, king of Tyre, a Sidonian.

The grace forsook him, whose godly father had got divine promises that his own son will be set a king, and that he will build a house for His name. ... He diverted, who was spiritually raised by his mother Bathsheba (Proverb 31: 1-3). ... He fell, who was taught by the prophet Nathan

The love of women turned away the heart of the wise, godly, mighty king Solomon. It was the rock that broke his ship in the midst of the ocean of this world. Being no more able to

save himself of this calamity, he became in need of God's grace to save him. It was befitting of him to know how to direct his heart toward the true love.

- + Far from it to say to you: [Do not ever love anything?]; For if you do not, you would be cold-blooded, dead, miserable, and hateful. ... Go ahead and love! But be careful whom you love.

(St. Augustine)

According to the scholar Origen, uniting to a wife refers to the unity of the soul to wisdom and virtue. But getting connected to foreign women and concubines, would otherwise refer to that Solomon's soul connected to temporal philosophies. According to St. Augustine, having concubines refers to that Solomon's soul sojourned from having common citizenship with the people of God, and embraced every thought strange to faith.

"From the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. For surely, they will turn away your hearts after their gods'. Solomon clung to these with love" (2)

Saying, himself, that stolen waters are sweet; Solomon assumed that his happiness lies in uniting with those women forbidden for him; in whose softness, sweetness of talk, and looseness of attires, he found the pleasure he did not find in Pharaoh's daughter, his lawful wife, nor in the Jewish women. He clung to them with love; became fond of them, spent most of his time with them, and admired their talk.

In the old, men of the East used to boast their greatness, not by the size of their possessions, gold, and horses, as much as by the number of their women. Although women represent the weak, and lesser side of man, yet it is the side most active on him, and on his whole family. Solomon, whose women turned his heart to their gods; has been

a living example of such a fact. Hence the Holy Book warned against the heathen women (Exodus 16; 34: 15; Deuteronomy 7: 1-3; Ezra 2, 9: 1; 10: 3; Nehemiah 13: 23).

“He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines; and his wives turned away his heart” (3)

Yet, in his sermon in which he proclaimed his repentance and remorse, he testified that he did not find a good one among them.

King David did wrong by marrying more than one woman, not aware that by doing that he opened the door before his own son to get attached to one thousand women, with the assumption that it is within his right as a king.

It is difficult for a believer, with the fear of the Lord in his heart, to have a second wife, even if his first one passes away; How, then, could Solomon, surrounded by a thousand wife and concubine, keep the fear of the Lord in himself?! ... It was befitting of him, he who got the heavenly wisdom, to be committed to what it proclaims; namely, to be attached to one wife. But, having allowed himself to be attached to a second one, who turned to be not enough for him; assumed that he would follow the example of his father, and would not exceed the number of wives he had; Yet having opened that door, he could not control himself to keep at a certain limit. For lust knows no control, unless the grace of God works in him.

2- SOLOMON'S HEART TURNED AFTER HIS WOMEN'S GODS: (4)

“For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David” (4)

As Solomon died when he was 60 years old, according to some scholars, by saying: *“when Solomon was old”*, he means, when he was 50 or 55 years old..

Assuming that he could keep his worship of the living true God, beside his worship of the gods of his women, he was not aware that his heart was no more loyal to the Lord his God, nor walking completely after Him. We cannot say that he has utterly forsaken the worship of the living God, but, being preoccupied with other things, he became lukewarm in his worship. When Solomon had the hot Spirit, he could draw Pharaoh's daughter to worship the living God, but when he became lukewarm, his foreign women drew him after their gods. He probably embraced some thoughts like the modern ones, proclaiming that, as long as all kinds of worship exhort good behavior, there would be nothing wrong to follow any of them?!

- + David, the good man, after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13: 14), happened later to commit murder and adultery (2 Samuel 11). And Solomon, whom God granted every grace and wisdom, was led by his women to idol-worship. It was the Son of God, alone, who was kept without sin up to the end (Hebrew 4: 15).

(The scholar Tertullian)

- + Solomon, the son of David, just like his father David, fell into the same snare, and because of the desire for women, he turned away from the God of his fathers.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Solomon sang commending wisdom (1 Kings 4: 33); Yet, because of the desire for women, he apostatized from God. And to perceive that this could happen even with the closest of kin, 'Amnon' David's son was enflamed with unlawful desire for his own sister 'Tamar' (2 Samuel 13).

(St. Jerome)

3- SOLOMON TURNS TOWARD IDOL-WORSHIP: (5-8)

“For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites” (5)

Ashtoreth or Venus, a Canaanite goddess connected to fertility; bound to Ishtar in Babel and Assyria, as the goddess of sexual love, motherhood, and fertility, has been the main female goddess for all the Canaanite tribes; her worship moved from Tyre to Cartage, where it greatly flourished. She was the goddess of the moon worshipped by the Greeks and the Romans, under the name Aphrodite, and sometimes Urania, Coelestis, Juno, and other names. According to its own traditions; her priestesses officially practiced adultery, and her worship was bound to that of a male god by the name of Baal; symbolizing the moon and the sun.

In the days of king Josiah, her worship was utterly banned in Israel (2 kings 23: 13).

Presenting to us a literate piece about the fall of Solomon in setting altars for the goddess Ashtoreth, ‘Milon says:

Ashtoreth, called ‘Ashtar’ by the Sidonians;
The queen of heavens, had two crescent horns;
She shined with splendor at night by the moon;
To her, the virgins of Sidon offered vows and songs;
In Jerusalem, they did not cease to sing, standing in long cues;
Her temple was set on the Mount of Offense;
By the king who was fond of, and submitted to his women;
His heart, though wide, yet, through his beautiful heathen women, he turned away after the defiled idols;
And ended up losing the paradise.

According to some, Solomon turning after his women, built altars for foreign gods, where sacrifices were offered and incense was burnt. Yet the Holy Book did not mention that he, himself, partook of those worships, offered sacrifices, nor burned incense.

To Milcom or Moleck, the abomination of the Ammonites; a Canaanite name, meaning (king) (Leviticus 18: 21; Acts 7: 43), the Ammonites used to offer human sacrifices. Its idol was made of bronze, with the head of a calf on which there was a crown. In the hollow body and throne, they used to ignite a fire, and on the two hands, red-hot with heat, the priest put a child sacrifice to burn quickly, and his screams would not be heard amid the high sound of drums.

The Jews fell into that worship which was strongly condemned by the prophets along the generations; and because they held fast to it, God's wrath dwelt upon them. Molock, according to the idol-worshipping Canaanites, was the king of hell,.

Melcom bound to Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites, who were called the nation of Chemosh (Numbers 21: 29; Jeremiah 48: 46). The image of Chemosh, god of the sun, worshipped as a king on his people, and as the god of war, was put on some coins, carrying a sword or spear, with two flames on his sides (Numbers 21: 29).

Engraved on a Moabite stone, was a phrase by which Mesh king of Moab (2 kings 3: 4) referred his conquests to god Chemosh. There was close relationship between Chemosh and Melcom, god of the Ammonites (Judges 11: 24; 1 kings 11: 5); in both, children were offered as sacrifices(2 kings 27).

“Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon” (6-7)

Unfortunately, after building the temple, which was considered as the most holy place in the world at that time, Solomon set high places, like that of 'Tophet'.

The daughter of Pharaoh differed from the rest of Solomon's women; We did not hear that she ever built a temple for the god Ammon or for the goddess Isis.

It is obvious that the mountain east of Jerusalem was the 'Mount of Olives' (Zechariah 14: 4), to which later, because of the idol-worship temples built on it in the days of Solomon, was given the name of 'Mount of offence' Those temples came opposite to the temple of Jehovah; And from the pool of 'Siloam', only few yards far from it, the priests working in the temple of the Lord, and those working in that of the idol, used to draw water for their work.

According to the early travelers of the east, in their days, the high place of Chemosh was located at the northern quarter; whereas that of Molech was located at the southern quarter.

Earlier, we used to hear about Solomon, beloved by the Lord (2 Samuel 12: 24); in whom He was delighted (1 Kings 10: 9). Now we hear that God became angry with him, on account of that he turned away to sin.

The two times God appeared to Solomon, the first before the temple was built, and the second time during its dedication, came to be for the judgment of Solomon, who did not abide in attaching to the Lord with complete faithfulness.

Despite the reforms carried out later on by Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, and Hezekiah, those locations of idol-worship remained in place until the days of Josaiah; probably left to be used as places of worship for the foreigners who come to Jerusalem for trade business.

“And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods” (8)

The heathens used to burn the incense first, then present the sacrifice, particularly in the worship of ‘Hither Asia’; an order that became a custom received by the generations directly following the fall; burning the incense being a symbol of prayer and supplication to God, to be followed by proclaiming the need for reconciliation through the blood.

The prophet Jeremiah was probably thinking of the fall of Solomon, when he listened to the voice of God rebuking the apostate people, saying: *“Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory, for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be very desolate”, says the Lord, 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: 11-13)

Yes indeed, It is befitting of us to raise a lamentation upon Solomon, as we stand confused, and marvel how he, who sought the heavenly wisdom, to walk heavenly, would end up as dust! ... How he, around whom the gold accumulated without limit, would, himself, become dross! ... How he, to whom the kings of the earth came to ask counsel, had acquired the idiocy of those heathen women! ... How he, the elder, had become a slave of such youthful desires! ... How he, who dedicated the beginning of his royal life, the energies of his people, and those of the surrounding nations, to build the temple of God, ended up building temples for idol-worship!

4- GOD’S WARNING TO SOLOMON: (9 – 13)

“So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice” (9)

Sin is very sinful, and whoever commits it would never be endured by God. Solomon, who has been the object of delight of God, and to whom He appeared twice; having sinned, and went far in it, God became angry with him.

The story of Solomon will remain a lesson for every believer. Let him whoever is standing up, beware, lest he falls. Let us all cry-out together with the psalmist, saying: *"My sin is ever before me"* (Psalm 51: 3); not to despair, but to cast oneself into the bosom of God, and to attach oneself to the divine grace.

Despite God's appearance twice to Solomon, yet he turned away from Him. Every believer, and every leader, should, therefore beware lest his eyes would turn away from the vision of God, transfiguring in his heart. For the enemy aims his arrows, more, toward the shepherd and the leader, in order to scatter the flock, and to destroy the weak souls.

"And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods, but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded" (10)

Solomon who commanded his people to keep his commandments, and to submit to him in obedience; he, himself, did not keep God's commandments, nor committed himself to submit to Him.

+ Solomon who brought chariots from Egypt, had become a victim of evil desires; ... According to the prophet Jeremiah: *"They were like well-fed lusty stallions; everyone neighed after his neighbor's wife"* (Jeremiah 5: 8). No doubt the Lord would not find pleasure in such an attitude.

(St. Jerome)

"Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My

statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you, and give it to your servant” (11)

The divine message came that Solomon will drink from the same cup which he had set. The way he rebelled against the Lord his God, and did not submit to Him, his own kingdom will rebel against him; he will lose ten tribes to his servant Jeroboam. Rebellion, therefore destroys the kingdom of the rebel, and takes away his authority, glory, and riches.

“Nevertheless, I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen” (12-13)

By chastisement, God, the longsuffering, warned Solomon, yet He allowed for it to be postponed till the days of his son Rehoboam, who was to succeed him on the throne. The chastisement were to be conducted as follows:

- 1- By postponing it for the sake of his father David, the Lord gives Solomon the chance to repent and to repair what he had corrupted. If God, for the sake of the righteous David did not allow for the division of the kingdom to happen in Solomon's days, it was befitting of the later to return to the godly life to present a blessing to his seed.
- 2- The dissension would take place in the days of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, from one of the foreign women, an Ammonite (1 king 14: 21), who most probably had an important role in provoking idol-worship in Israel.

- 3- God did not tear away the whole kingdom, but left one tribe to Solomon's son, to give hope to the kings of Judah, that if they return to God with their whole heart, God would let them have all the other tribes back. In other words, the way Solomon gradually apostatized from his faithfulness to the Lord, the chastisement also came gradually, and not by tearing away the whole kingdom. The tribe of Benjamin was left to the descendants of Solomon for the sake of his father David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city on which the name of the Lord was called. ... God did not say: 'For the sake of the temple'; For by Solomon's fall in idol-worship, and his disobedience to God, What he has previously done, whatever was his intention and expenses, would not intercede for him nor for his descendants. By giving one tribe to Solomon's son – probably meant that of Judah -- on account of that it was so great a tribe and numerous in number, to dissolve the tribe of Benjamin in it -- was left by God to him, to realize His promise to David, that from his seed, the Messiah, the true King will come. That is why God did not destroy the tribe of Judah, and did not take the royal feature out of it, till the day of the coming of the Lord King; and for the sake of Jerusalem, as well, being a symbol of the church. It is as though God did not take away the royal feature from Solomon's seed, that from it, the King, the Son of David, and His bride, the holy church, the true Jerusalem would come.
- 4- By His chastisement on Solomon, God confirms that He does not take revenge for Himself, but opens the door of hope before him for repentance; Hence He did not utterly reject him; but in him the words of God to his father David was realized, saying: *"If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the blows of the sons of men; but my mercy shall not depart from him"* (2 Samuel 7: 14, 15).

It is obvious that that warning had its activity in Solomon's life; as we see him present repentance in his book of Ecclesiastes, proclaiming his great remorse for his foolishness and idiocy; and seeking from the believers to beware of evil, to fear the Lord, and to keep His commandments.

To those who wonder whether Solomon had truly repented in his last days, the Holy Book, talking about the good men, hinted to this, by saying: “*They walked in the way of David and Solomon*” (2 Chronicles 11: 17). Yet, according to some, it did not openly refer to it, to exhort the reader to beware of sin, and not persist on evil, claiming that in the end, they will repent like Solomon.

The Lord raises up adversaries against Solomon:

The Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon in the person of Hadad the Edomite. Although Solomon never met him nor did him any harm, yet Hadad intended to avenge what David has previously done to his people, when the head of his army, Joab, killed every male in Edom.

It is amazing how he says: “*The Lord raises up adversaries*”. As long as we are in this world, together with the gifts of God, we need the presence of some kind of affliction, to be like a watch dog, to keep man from haughtiness and self-boasting, because of his success, riches, or honor. By allowing for the presence of an adversary to the believer, God intends for him to walk along the narrow way, borne on the divine arms.

In the last days of Solomon, adversaries to his reign increased in number: Hadad the Edomite, in the south-east of his kingdom; Rezon the Syrian in the north-east; his servant Jeroboam in the north of Israel; and the king of Egypt who gave refuge to the rebellious Jeroboam. Ahijah the prophet prophesied to Jeroboam that he will be king on ten tribes after the death of Solomon. According to some, a part of the tribe of Benjamin has been with Judah, and not the whole tribe (1 king12: 210; the same way concerning the tribe of Simon.

5- THE LORD STIRS UP ADVERSARIES TO CHASTISE SOLOMON: (14 – 19)

The first adversary: Hadad the Edomite:

“Now the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was a descendant of the king of Edom” (14)

When Solomon sent to Hiram to help him in building the temple of the Lord, he could say then that he had no adversary (sataa) (1 Kings 5: 4); that peace and security have prevailed on his kingdom; and that every man lived peacefully under his vine and his fig tree (1 Kings 4: 25). But now, as Solomon built temples for idol-worship, God allowed for him to have several adversaries at the same time, particularly Hadad, Rezon, and Jeroboam.

Although God postponed the chastisement until the days of Rehoboam, Solomon's son; yet He allowed to set those three adversaries during Solomon's days, to make him perceive the seriousness of the situation, and not to persist on falling into the sin, on the assumption that he and his seed live in peace and security.

It would not be possible for Hadad the Edomite, Rezon, and Jeroboam, to bring harm upon Solomon, and to become his enemies, if Solomon had not made God, Himself, his enemy. As according to St. John Chrysostom, no one can harm any man, unless man harms himself.

In his condolence letter, sent by St. Jerome to 'Ostochiom' to comfort her for her mother Paula's death, he referred to her adversaries, saying:

- + Envy chases virtue. As according to 'Horace': Lightning strikes the top of the mountain. Do not marvel that I so refer to men and women; on account of that the Pharisees have succeeded to crucify our Lord Himself. All saints have got those who seek their harm. Even in paradise, there was the serpent by whose envy, death came to the world (Wisdom 2: 24). The Lord, therefore, by stirring up (Hadad the Edomite) against 'Paula', and through warning her by a thorn in her body, so

that she would not be puffed up (1 Corinthians 12: 7), nor boast her virtues, by comparing herself to other women, she reached the climax of perfection.

(St. Jerome)

'Hadad', was a common name among the Edomites; a royal title, probably of Syrian origin, meaning (the sun) in Syria and Edom.

'Hadad' has been a prince in a royal house; As a little child, he fled to Egypt before the slaughter of Joab, together with a number of his father's servants. There, he found favor in the sight of Pharaoh, who gave him his wife's sister in marriage. In due time, God stirred up Hadad's heart to provoke him to go back to his own country, to become a thorn in Solomon's side.

"For it happened, when David was in Edom, and Joab the commander of the army, had gone up to bury the slain, after he had killed every male in Edom, ..." (15)

David started the battle and won (Psalm 60: 6-23; 68; 118: 7-12); Then Joab set forth to complete the submission of Edom. According to some, Joab had gone up to bury the Israelites slain in the battle of the Valley of Salt, north of Araba; While according to others, he had gone up to complete killing every male in Edom.

"(Because for six months Joab remained there with all Israel, until he had cut down every male in Edom), that Hadad fled to go to go to Egypt, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him. Hadad was still a little child" (16-17)

The animosity of Hadad and Rezon goes back to David's days, but God allowed them to appear as two serious adversaries in Solomon's days, to chasten him. For God, everything has its own proper time, to realize a particular goal.

*“Then they arose from Midian, and came to Paran, and they took men with them from Paran and came to Egypt,
to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave him a house, appointed food for him, and gave him land” (18)*

‘Midian’, south of Judah, was inhabited by some nomadic tribes east of Edom (Numbers 7; 22: 4; 25: 15-35), Its capital ‘Midian’ was located on the River ‘Amon’.

‘Paran’, the desert called ‘Maze’, very close to south of Judah..

‘Pharaoh’, king of the twenty-first dynasty; probably ‘Pausennes’. ... Pharaohs of Egypt used to care for making good relationship and friendship with the surrounding nations and kings

*“And Hadad found a great favor in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him as wife the sister of his own wife, that
is the sister of queen ‘Taphenes”” (19)*

‘Taphenes’, the name of an Egyptian goddess; Pharaoh’s wife used to be called ‘Hagbiyreaah’, namely, the (first lady) among the other wives of the king; Such a title, in the royal house of Judah, was usually given to the queen mother, to be taken over after her death, by the queen.

“The sister of ‘Taphenes’ bore him ‘Genubath’ his son, whom ‘Taphenes’ weaned in Pharaoh’s house. And

‘Genubath’ was in Pharaoh’s household among the sons of Pharaoh. Now when Hadad heard in Egypt that

David rested with his fathers, and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh,

‘Let me depart, that I may go to my own country’. Then Pharaoh said to him, ‘But what have you lacked with me that suddenly you seek to go to your own country?’. So he answered, ‘Nothing. But do let me go anyway””

(20-22)

Yes indeed, Hadad lacked nothing; but he would never find his true happiness except in his own country. So it is with the believer; who, even he lacks nothing in this world; if this temporal life smiles at him, and presents to him riches, glory, and honor, his true happiness will only be in his true home – the bosom of God the Father; the heaven, open before us all.

Despite what Hadad enjoyed of gifts, pleasure, and glory in Egypt, and whatever honor and care he had in Pharaoh's household; But what truly preoccupied his heart was to restore the honor of his country 'Edom'; He, therefore, was waiting for the death of both David and Joab.

Did Hadad return to Edom? Did he become a king over it? ... It is obvious that he did return, having become, together with Rezon adversaries to Solomon. According to some, he took back a great part of Edom, probably the Mountain of Edom, while the rest of it in the valley, like 'Ezion-Geber' remained in the hands of the Israelites. Others, depending on the phrase: "*There was then no king in Edom, only a deputy of the king*" (1 kings 22: 47); even until the days of Joram king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah; and on that saying: "*Edom revolted against Judah's authority, and made a king over themselves*" (2 kings 8: 20), claim that Hadad did not reign over Edom. According to 'Thenius', what came in 1 kings 22: 47, 48, that in the days of Jehoshaphat, Hadad's family was dead, and considering himself responsible for Edom, he appointed a deputy, until a king is enthroned; Jehoshaphat interfered in the inner political struggles in Edom.

Another view depends on the phrase, saying: "*(Rezon) was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon (besides the troubles that Hadad caused)*" (25); that 'Hadad', setting forth from Egypt, did not reign over Edom, but came to 'Rezon' the Aramite, and supported him in opposing Solomon.

And a third view says that Hadad and Rezon were one and the same person.

The second Adversary: Rezon the Aramite:

“And God raised up another adversary against him, Rezon the son of Eliadah who had fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah” (23)

Rezon is himself ‘Hezion’ who came in 1 kings 15: 18; probably one of the persons who took the throne out of Hadad’s family, that took it back after his death.

- + ‘Rezon’, who took the throne by force, a contemporary of Solomon; was one of the commanders of Hadad who was defeated by king David. At that time, Rezon and his men fled away, and lived together as highway robbers and thieves; then took over Damascus, where he reigned until David took it over, submitted Syria (Aram), and drove Rezon away. But after the diversion of Solomon, feeling that God forsook Israel, Rezon took back Damascus, was joined by Hadad, and became together adversaries of Solomon.
- + ‘Hezion’ (Hadad II) was a contemporary of Rehoboam.
- + ‘Tavrimom’ (Hadad III) was a contemporary of ‘Ebiam’.
- + ‘Benhadad’ (Hadad IV) was a contemporary of Asa.

“So he gathered men to him, and became captain over a band of raiders, when David killed those of Zobah. And they went to Damascus and dwelt there, and reigned in Damascus. He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon (besides the troubles that Hadad caused), and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.

Then Solomon's servant, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite from Zereda, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also rebelled against the king" (24 – 26)

God set up Hadad and Rezon, the Gentiles, as adversaries of Solomon; Whereas Jeroboam, the Ephraimite, rebelled against the king. Born in Zereda in the Valley of Jordan, known as industrious and understanding, was appointed by Solomon as an overseer on the laborers from the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Joseph's house), when he was repairing the wall of Jerusalem that was damaged as David took the city over from the Jebusites. Probably feeling that Solomon has put heavier burden on the two tribes Ephraim and Manasseh, he stirred up his tribe against the tribe of Judah, favored by the king; and in particular, against the royal family.

At the beginning of the work, particularly during the building of the temple, Solomon cared not to put too much burden over his own people, leaving the heavier works to the captives of war. Yet, with the increase of the constructions, he had to change his policy; which made the tribes of Israel feel the pressure of the forced labor, beside the extremely high taxes.

"And this what caused him to rebel against the king: Solomon had built the Millo and repaired the damages to the city of David his father. The man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor; and Solomon seeing that the young man was industrious, made him the officer over all the labor force of the house of Joseph. Now it happened at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilomite met him on the way, and he had clothed himself with a new garment; and the two were alone in the field" (27-29)

The Shelomite, means an inhabitant of Shiloh in Mount Ephraim, the first sanctuary for the people in the promised land (Joshua 18: 19; Judges 18: 31; 1 Samuel 4: 3).

6- THE PROPHET AHIJAH PROPHESES THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM: (30-39)

“Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces” (30)

The new garment (salmaah) was worn by the prophet, and not by Jeroboam, as thought by some. One piece with four angles. It was a new garment, for he sets a new kingdom, the divided kingdom of Israel.

“And he said to Jeroboam, ‘Take for yourself ten pieces, for this says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to you” (31)

According to Cyprian the martyr, the garment in the Holy Book refers to the church or the kingdom. That is why when the Lord Christ was crucified, His garment was not torn, but on it a lot was cast between the soldiers, for whoever gets it (John 19: 23, 24). The Lord did not wish for the church, the garment of Christ, to lose its unity. His garment was without seam, woven from top in one piece from up downward; namely, [This garment, bearing a unity coming down from the Father up in heaven, should never be torn by whoever receive and posses it; but without division, we receive the whole garment complete. He, who divides the church of Christ, cannot acquire His garment,

“But he shall have one tribe for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel” (32)

Despite the unfaithfulness of man, God will remain faithful; He promised to keep the seed of David, until the coming of the Messiah, the Son of David (Ezekiel 21: 27). Although He chastens the house of David because of its diversion, yet He does not destroy it. Although Solomon proved to be a sinner, yet he was the seed of David, from which Christ, the Savior of sinners, would come.

The divine promise would endure, to set from the seed of David a Lamp, referring to the Lord Christ, the Light of the world, who will shine, not only on the children of Israel, but on the Gentiles, as well.

“Because they have forsaken Me, and worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Melcom the god of the people of Ammon; and have not walked in My ways to do what is right in My eyes, and keep My statutes and judgments, as did his father David. However, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, because I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes” (33-34)

- + Who walked in the holiness and faithfulness of heart like him (David), to consummate the will of God; for whose sake forgiveness was given to his children when they sinned; and whose rights were kept for their descendants?

(St. Ambrose)

“But I will take the kingdom out of his son’s hand and give it to you – ten tribes. And to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David will always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Myself,

to put My name there. So I will take you; and you shall reign over all your heart's desires, and you shall be king over Israel. Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did; then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David; and will give Israel to you" (35-38).

The condition concerning the kingdom of Jeroboam was the same that was given to Solomon, for the continuation of his kingdom (1 Kings 3: 14; 6: 12; 9: 4); namely, faithfulness in keeping the divine commandment.

But Jeroboam did not get a divine promise for the continuation of his kingdom, the way king David had; for it is impossible for the division of the kingdom to endure. Anyway, Jeroboam did not heed that condition; hence, once his son died, his family lost the throne (1 kings 15: 28)

"And I will afflict the descendants of David because of this, but not forever" (39)

By saying, "*But not forever*", he refers to the Babylonian captivity to come, when the house David will lose the throne; then comes the Son of David, Jesus the Lord of glory, to reign forever.

7- SOLOMON SEEKS TO KILL JEROBOAM: (40)

"Solomon, therefore sought to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon" (40)

Although the talk between the prophet Ahijah and Jeroboam was in secret; yet it so seems that Jeroboam, not waiting for the prophecy to be realized, started to plan things; and most probably to spread the news; Solomon heard, and perceived that Jeroboam was planning to take his kingdom by force.

Coming to know the man whom God set to chastise him, who will divide the kingdom, and take ten tribes from it; it was befitting of Solomon to deal with the problem from its roots, by putting an end to the foreign idol-worship; but he instead sought to kill Jeroboam, with the assumption that he could then, control history; disregarding the role of God, Himself, the Maker of history.

According to some, Shishak was, himself, king 'Sesostris'.

8- THE DEATH OF SOLOMON: (41 – 42)

“Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon?. And the period that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. Then Solomon rested with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place”
(41-43)

Solomon reigned while he was young, and did good and exalted things, as well as extremely bad things. As to the former achievements:

- He enjoyed wisdom since his youth, loved it above all the glories of the world; and started his life with godliness.
- He built the unique temple; and the Lord appeared to him twice.
- He wrote the Holy Books: the proverbs, the Ecclesiastes, and the Song of songs.
- He established a great kingdom, of a great reputation in the world at the time.

- He built a marine fleet, and cared for international trade.
- He established good relationships with the surrounding nations.
- He cared for constructions, and had exalted taste in architecture.
- He had great skill of management.
- He had great knowledge of many natural sciences.
- He was an author and a poet; and, because of his fame, it is believed that many eastern philosophers quoted his views. His proverbs and poems are kept in the ancient books of the East; although it is difficult to discern what is authentic and what is falsely referred to him.
- According to Josephus, Solomon wrote a multitude of recipes for healing illness, and driving demons out.
- According to many, Solomon had a magic ring, by which he used to practice magic, and heal the sick.

And as much as he had of exalted fame in the ancient world, Solomon presents a painful example of how the great and mighty could miserably fall:

- He started by keeping the divine commandment, then fell into disobedience.
- Getting attached to a multitude of foreign wives and concubines, destroyed the purity of his heart toward God; and introduced idol-worship among his people.
- Exaggeration in construction exhausted his people, as far as their commitment to hard work, and the huge expenses.
- He sowed the seeds of division and dissension of the kingdom.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 11

CONSUMMATE THE ROAD WITH ME,

FOR YOU ARE THE BEGINNING AND THE END

- + Perceiving that God is the Beginning;
From his youth, he delivered his whole heart to him;
Yet, along the way, he gave his heart to foreign idol-worshipping women.
The heart that enjoyed God at the start of the way;
Did not consummate it up to its end;
The heart that was dedicated together with the temple;
Came to follow the gods of his foreign women;
The hand that stretched to build the temple of the Lord;
Stretched to build high places for Chemosh and Melcom;
- + Be, O Lord, the beginning and the end of my way;
Accompany me all the way, that my heart would be wholly Yours;
I wish my heart does not falter between light and darkness;
I wish the kingdom of Christ in my depths is not torn.
- + With love, You set for Solomon adversaries, to turn his soul back to you;
Hadad the Edomite, who fled to Egypt in the days of David;
He who forsook all the good gifts of Pharaoh to return to his land;
And to be a thorn in Solomon's back;
He joined forces with Rezon the Aramite against Solomon;
The prophet Ahijah prophesied to Jeroboam that he would enjoy reigning over ten tribes;
- + Send adversaries; For affliction is for the edification of my soul;
Lead by Yourself my life all the way;
I will deliver my life wholly in Your hands.

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THE SECOND DIVISION

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

CHAPTER 12

TEARING THE KINGDOM UP

Three times, God warned against the division of the kingdom because of unfaithfulness: the first time, the warning was directed from God directly to Solomon (1 Kings 11: 11-13); the second time, when Solomon came to know that the prophet Ahijah prophesied to Jeroboam that there would be a divided kingdom (1 Kings 11: 29-32); and the third time, with the prophecy of Shemaiah the man of God to Rehoboam the son of Solomon (23-24). And despite of all those warnings, the heart of Rehoboam did not move to repentance and the return to God.

The story of Solomon and his son Rehoboam, therefore, shall remain along the history, an example of the seriousness of the corruption of a leader. The corruption that came into the life of Solomon has giving fruit in the life of his son Rehoboam, and destroyed the kingdom. There were many who drank from the cup that Solomon filled. The Holy Book warns us, saying: *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered’”* (Zechariah 13: 7)

What we saw in the life of Solomon the king and his son Rehoboam, provoke us to give great care and caution in choosing a leader; whether a deacon, a priest, or a bishop; Against choosing an unbefitting bishop, the “Laws of the apostles” say: [In case such a leader happen to corrupt his honor, the church of God in his domain will be scattered; ... Through the evil of the leader, and his disregard of justice, the doubt grows in the congregation, that will suffer from his own disease, and will be committed to perdition together with him; the same way it happened with the people connected to Jeroboam (1 Kings 12; and those who cooperated with Korah against the prophet Moses (Numbers 16))

According to St. John Chrysostom: [The devil fiercely stirs up against the shepherds, on account of that through their perdition, their flock will be scattered. By slaying a number of sheep, the flock will get fewer in number; but by striking the shepherd, the entire flock will perish].

1- The enthronement of Rehoboam	1
2- The return of Jeroboam	2
3- Rehoboam rejects the counsel of the wise elders	3 - 15
4- The revolt of the ten tribes	16 - 20
5- Rehoboam attempts to suppress the revolt of the ten tribes	21 - 24
6- Jeroboam bears the appearance of false religion.	25 – 33

1- THE ENTHEONEMENT OF REHOBOAM: (1)

“Now Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king” (1)

‘Rehoboam’ a word meaning (width of heart for the people); Nevertheless, his behavior was the opposite of his name; as in his heart there was no width for the people.

He was the son of one of the foreign women (Emmonite), whom Solomon married (21). The son of the wisest man on earth, inherited from his father the throne, but not the wisdom; and in his veins the grace of God did not run.

Although Solomon sat on the throne while he was very young; yet he was wise beyond his age in seeking the heavenly wisdom. Whereas his son, who was 41 years old when he reigned, wisdom had no place in his depths. Neither the number of years, nor the theoretical knowledge, give wisdom to man; but the humility of the heart of man before God, and his longing for wisdom, will open the door before it to enter and to reign in his depths, and to ordain his thoughts, words, and behavior.

Rehoboam probably was Solomon's only son, or his firstborn, despite marrying about one thousand, between wives and concubines; as the Holy Book did not refer to Solomon's care for raising his children, blessing them, nor giving a farewell counsel to his crown prince to keep the divine covenant, to hold fast to the divine commandment, and to care for the good of the people.

Why did he choose Shechem for his enthronement?

He probably was enthroned first in Jerusalem, then later went to Shechem (Nables) to be enthroned by the northern tribes. In Shechem, 20 miles north of Jerusalem, Abimelech was previously enthroned a king (Judges 9); and in it a conference was annually held for all the tribes (Joshua 24: 1). Feeling what went on in the minds of the ten tribes, of grumbling against his father, Rehoboam probably chose to go to Shechem to appease them, without any serious thinking of solving the roots of the problem. The northern tribes were ready to dissent from the southern tribes for several reasons, as we have seen in the introduction of this book. Now, building the temple and the royal palace and its annexes in Jerusalem, to make it the center of political and religious leadership, made the jealousy of the northern tribes more and more.

It is amazing how Shechem, where all the tribes gathered together to enthrone Rehoboam, Jeroboam built to make it the capital of his kingdom opposing Rehoboam. The location where Rehoboam got his honor and glory, became, therefore, the center of opposition against him and his kingdom.

"All Israel" (1) does not mean the whole people, but delegates from all the tribes; who came, not to chose him a king -- as the royal system had already been well-established, and everyone knew about God's choice of David and his descendants after him as kings -- but to renew the covenant between the king and his people; for each side has their own commitments.

All the people then went to Shechem to enthrone Rehoboam the son of Solomon a king; And at the same time the majority of the tribes (10 tribes) sent to Jeroboam to come back from Egypt to help them get liberated from the yoke put by Solomon over their necks.

Few moments passed, during which Rehoboam thought that the whole people were exultant for his enthronement; and that no adversary could destroy his kingdom or shake his person. Being deceived by the outer appearances, he did not seriously think of establishing his kingdom by justice and godliness.

2- THE RETURN OF JEROBOAM: (2)

“So it was, when Jeroboam the son of Nabat heard it (he was still in Egypt for he had fled from the presence of king Solomon, and had been dwelling in Egypt), that they sent and called him” (2)

When Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam, the later fled to Egypt, to be sent back by the Lord in due time. Solomon assumed that he managed to get rid of him, not perceiving that he will set the dissented kingdom in the days of his son Rehoboam. Solomon assumed that, by marrying Pharaoh's daughter he had Egypt on his side, and did not perceive that Pharaoh would embrace him, who would destroy his own son. That is the fruition of whoever solve his problem by any mean other than by prayer and repentance.

3- REHOBOAM REJECTS THE COUNSEL OF THE WISE ELDERS: (3 – 15)

“then Jeroboam and the whole congregation of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy; now, therefore lighten the burdensome service of your father, and the heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you” (3-4)

The people did not complain that Solomon had given his back to God, disregarded the divine commandment, and built altars for idol-worship; but all what preoccupied them was that he forced them to work, and put on them very high taxes. They were seeking an easier life, whether they worship God, Ashtoreth, or Molech.

Their complaint bore just a part of the truth, but disregarded other positive parts. If Solomon put high taxes on his people; but we should not forget how he gained gold and silver to the account of his kingdom from the surrounding nations, that silver became as common as stones; and that his reign was so characterized by peace, inside and outside; that the budget of the nation was not dedicated mainly for the army; nor the energies of the people turned to wars. ... Peace had its effect in the prosperity of the people.

On another aspect, the people did not revolt against Rehoboam, but proclaimed their desire to serve him, if he shared their feelings, and, not if he lightened the burdensome high taxes altogether; but just to lighten them. They did not seek from him to become their servant, but to be themselves his servants, to have him as a father and a king; then, they would race to serve him with their whole hearts. Seeing their leader live for their sake, and not just for his own, the people will love him, listen to him, serve him, and defend him. Whereas the tyrant leader who boasts in himself, would create a doubtful people, who are always ready to revolt against him.

It is, therefore, befitting of the leader , not to make his people carry his burdens, but to carry their burdens in his heart; and to have his mind preoccupied with his responsibility to their expense; dedicating his time for their edification, then they would submit to him as his children, and members of his body, being the head. Happy would be the people who have such a leader; and safe and secure would be the leader who has such a people.

. *“So he said to them. ‘Depart for three days, then come back to me’,
and the people departed” (5)*

He gave them three days to respond to their quest; which was a good act, to give himself, as well, the chance to think about it; Yet he disregarded the divine role; It was befitting of him to seek the counsel of God, being the true king of the people; who set him a king on his father's throne.

*"Then king Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said,
'How do you advise me to answer these people?'. And they spoke to him, saying, 'If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever'" (6-7)*

The elders presented the king a true concept of governing, namely, to bear the spirit of care, love, good words, and service; in order to reap their true love and submission forever. They sought from Rehoboam to realize what his father had proclaimed; that *"good words appease the anger"*; That whoever wishes to be a master let him first be a servant; And that the wise king perceive that he is the servant of his people, whose goal is their happiness.

"But he rejected the counsel which the elders gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him who stood before him. And he said to them, 'What counsel do you give? How should we answer the people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us'? Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, 'Thus you should speak to the people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us' – thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist'" (8-10)

That was a common proverb, meaning, that he will be stronger, and with more authority than his father.

“And now, whereas my father laid a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges” (11).

The young men who have grown up with him presented to him a dangerous counsel, a different concept of reigning, with tyranny, and violence; They planted in him the spirit of pride, and despise of others.

While the elders, without telling him what to say, sought from him to respond to his people with good words, to gain their love, The other counselors, did not just provoke the spirit of haughtiness and arrogance in him, but even told him what to say to those people. In their haughtiness, they sought from Rehoboam to admit that his father put a heavy yoke on them; not to lighten it, but to add to it.

It did not intend, just to add more taxes, but threatened to issue new laws as violent as scourges

Here we should not put the blame, only on the counselors, but we should put it, as well on Rehoboam for giving his back to God who left him for his own foolishness, and delivered him into the hands of his equally foolish counselors; so that the kingdom would be divided, and Rehoboam would lose ten tribes.

Talking in the ninth and tenth chapters of his fourth book on the ‘Institutions’, St. John Chrysostom talks about the commitment of the novice in monasticism, not to depend upon his own discernment, nor to hide any of his thoughts from the experienced elder who takes care of him, lest the devil would have the ability to seduce him with pride. He

should obey his guide with confidence, surety, and no hesitation, as though his command comes from heaven.

- + Whoever has the good mind, in humility, together with a faithful longing to discernment, whether through teaching or imitating what he sees in the elder fathers, instead of being preoccupied with entering into pointless debates; In him, the knowledge of everything, through practical experience would abide. Whereas he who starts by debate, will never reach the goal of the truth ... Our enemy the devil, would drag him away, to the extent of looking at the good and beneficial things, as not necessary, and even as harmful; and would cleverly, make him stubbornly hold fast to his own views, convinced that what fill his defiled mind are goodness, truth, and holy.

- + Obedience is your advocate before God. In case He asks you: 'Why did you do that?!' You would answer Him: 'You, O Lord commanded me to obey; and I have done according to Your command'; Then you will be justified.

Sailing on board such a ship is secure; man would sleep peacefully, with no worry whatsoever. On account of that her captain is there, taking care of everything. So will be he who walk with obedience; he travels toward heaven and perfection, sleeping, with no labor nor thinking about what he should do; on account of that there are those who run the ship and who watch over him.

It is indeed great for man to sail across the sea of this world, while on the arm of someone else. That is the great grace given by God to those who walk with obedience.

(St. John El-Dargi)

- + Whoever depends upon his own opinion, even if he is a saint, is deceived, and his deception is more serious than the beginner who delivers his ordinance into the hand of another. The former is like a captain who sails on board a ship without sail, nor paddles, depending upon his experience, while the later, is like one without experience who seeks from an experienced captain to take him on his well-equipped ship.

Let none of you be deceived and escape from the soft yoke of obedience, holding fast to his own opinion in spiritual matters like fasting and prayers, as well as others signs of faith and monasticism, assuming that by them he would be saved.

- + Obedience is denial of the soul; death of the will; burial of lust, and resurrection of humility.

Obedience is death of the members of the body, and of the covetousness of the soul; which, for the beginner, would be with pain; For the moderate, sometimes

with pain, and sometimes without; Whereas for the perfect, it would be utterly without pain, unless he does something according to his own will.

Those who intend to bear the yoke of Christ upon their necks; and place their own burdens upon the necks of others (their spiritual fathers or guides), would be committed to reject their own will, and do what they see as according to God's will.

- + Without a guide there would be no safety. From obedience will be humility; and from humility will be healing from pains; as it is written: "By our humility, the Lord remembered us, and saved us from our enemies".

(St. Johm Chrysostom)

The **scourges**: are some kinds of whips with iron pieces at their extremities, which cut into the flesh of the one scourged. The Romans were also known for using some kind of bows, known as 'scorpions', by which they could throw poisonous arrows which cause pain like that of scorpion stings.

"So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king directed, saying, 'Come back to me the third day'. Then the king answered the people roughly, and rejected the counsel which the elders had given him. And he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges'. So the king did not listen to the people, for the turn of affairs was from the Lord, that He might fulfill His word, which the lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilomite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (12-15)

- + Nothing would make the foot slide like pride. Love would move the foot ahead, to progress and to ascend; whereas pride would cause man to fall.

4- THE REVOLUT OF THE TEN TRIBES: (16 – 20)

“Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying, ‘What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now see to your own house O David!’”. So Israel departed to their tents. But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah” (16-17).

It ended up in the division of the kingdom; Instead of one strong kingdom, it came to be two weak ones before the surrounding nations; And they even came to be two adversary kingdoms, whose relationship passed through three stages:

- a- From Jeroboam to Omri in Israel; and from Rehoboam to Asa in Judah: The two kingdom bore a spirit of enmity, until Israel was defeated in a major battle against Judah. And with the renewal of war, Asa resorted to join forces with Aram, and entered into continuous battles against Israel.
- b- During the reign of Ahab the son of Omri, and his children Ahaziah and Joram in Israel; And of Jehoshaphat, Joram, and Ahaziah in Judah, the two kingdom had familial relationships by intermarriage; and a kind of alliance between them against the foreign enemy; until the two kings: Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah, were both killed by Jehu (1 kings 17 – 2 kings 10: 27).
- c- The third stage was characterized by adversity between the two kingdoms until Israel was captivated by the Assyrians

“Then king Rehobram sent Adoram who was taskmaster over the forced labor, all Israel stoned him to death.

Therefore king Rehoboam mounted his chriot in haste to flee to Jerusalem”
(18)

It was not wise of Rehoboam to send Adoram, the taskmaster over the forced labor, to collect taxes, at a time the people were revolting against him. By so doing, he revealed his foolishness and lack of wisdom; it revealed that he is utterly stranger to statesmanship. Stoning Adoram,. Rehoboam, feeling that his life became in danger, he had to flee from Shechem to Jerusalem, hoping to find some kind of security.

“So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day” (19)

In the days of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, the kingdom was divided for the following reasons:

- a- The main reason was that Solomon, together with the people turned away from God to idol-worship (11: 9-13; 29-39; 12: 15). The true life of faith grants the spirit of unity, through which the believer and the congregation come to enjoy the grace of God that supports and helps. Turning away from God, on the other hand, would destroy and devastate.
- b- Not sharing with the others their feelings, and not responding to their needs. Solomon might probably had some excuse to collect high taxes for the building of the temple of God, his own house with all its annexes, and his huge construction projects; But after the consummation of all those projects, it was befitting of Rehoboam to respond to the people, exhausted from high taxes; but disregarding them made him lose a great deal of money and honor, and destroyed the unity of the people. The Lord Christ calls us *"to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Matthew 22: 21); And the apostle Paul exhorts the believers to pay the taxes (Romans 14: 6-7); as being the right of the State for the sake of the public benefit. On the other hand, it is the duty of the statesmen, not to exhaust the people with too high taxes, but to act with justice together with mercy.
- c- Rehoboam, rejecting the counsel of the wise elders, disregarding their wisdom and long experience (1: 6-8), doubled the taxes.

"Now it came to pass when all Israel heard that Jehoram had come back, they sent for him and called him to the congregation and made him king over all Israel. There was none who followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only" (20)

Despite the fact that the rebels constituted ten tribes out of twelve tribes, God put in the hearts of Jeroboam and the ten tribes, not to seek to reject Rehoboam completely from his throne, and to replace him, to let the royal blood of David's seed, endure on the throne, until the time when the Son of David Himself will come and reign.

5- REHOBAM ATTEMPTS TO SUPPRESS THE REVOLT OF THE TEN TRIBES:

(21 – 24)

“And when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon” (21)

Feeling secure in Jerusalem, Rehoboam assumed that he could confront the rebellion of the ten tribes; but the prophet Shemaiah told him that this thing is according to a command from the Lord.

“But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, ‘Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel. Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me’. Therefore they obeyed the word of the Lord, and turned back, according to the word of the Lord” (22-24)

It was, therefore, not possible for Rehoboam to make the people go to fight against the ten tribes after Shemaiah the man of God proclaimed that the thing is from God, lest he would lose the few that he still had.

6- JEROBOAM FALSELY BEAR THE APPEARANCE OF RELIGION: (25-33)

It is good indeed for the statesman to care for his spiritual life and that of the people. And it is good indeed for the man of religion to pray for the sake of the peace of his country and its citizens. But it is not befitting of the statesman to abuse religion; nor of the man of religion to interfere in what does not concern him.

God promised Jeroboam to build for him an enduring house, if he heeds all that He commands him, and walks in His ways (11: 38); but once Jeroboam got the authority, he did not trust in the promise of God, and feared that the people would eventually return to the house of David (27; 12: 26). Disregarding the fact that what he had got was through a divine allowance, as previously prophesied by the prophet Ahijah the Shelomite (11: 29), he committed three sins:

- a- He built two centers for idol-worship: one in 'Bethel' in the southern part of his kingdom, and another in 'Dan' in the north.
- b- He appointed priests from all the tribes, and not just from the tribe of Levi, committing a great sin against the law (Numbers 3: 10).
- c- He declared feasts on his own; not for the glory of God, but to realize his personal goals by human planning (1: 32-33).

Many politicians use religion to gain more popularity among their people; But God seeks the heart, and not the outer appearance. (1 Samuel 16: 7).

- + If we study the book of Hosea, we shall see that all his prophecy was against Ephraim (the dissented kingdom of Israel), saying: "*Ephraim is like a silly dove, without sense*" (Hosea 7: 11); Doves always dwell in their special houses; but

Ephraim deserted the temple, their house, to dwell in the wilderness. We can say that all the children of Ephraim are heretics ... They deserted David and his kingdom to dwell in the wilderness. Calling them doves, refers to that, although they read the Holy Books, yet their readings are silly and without sense.

They made for themselves two golden calves in Bethel and in Dan; they became idol-worshippers; they utterly deserted the house of the Lord; they only think of gold.

(St. Jerome)

“Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel” (35)

A new king required a new capital, a new temple, a change in the system of priesthood, and in feasts, etc.

Jeroboam built for himself a palace in Shechen in Ephraim, and another in Penuel in Gad on the eastern bank of the River Jordan; in order to appear before the people as a man of religion; on account of that each of those two locations had its religious symbol and appreciation among the people. Shechem was the location where Jacob built an altar for God (Genesis 33: 18-20); And in it the people gathered together on two occasions: to renew the covenant with God, in a very awesome and fearful rite; on the two mounts: Ebal and Gerizim, between the tops of which Shechem is located (Joshua 8: 30-35; 24: 1-15). As to Penuel, it gained the honor of being the location where Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord (Genesis 32: 22-32)

Building two capitals in Shechem and Penuel is not the real problem; but the serious problem is what came after that; of setting two temples outside Jerusalem, and of changing the system of priesthood and worship; For that provoked the people to idol-worship; by which he broke the condition put before him by the Lord, to build for him an enduring royal house (1 Kings 11: 38).

“And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom may return to the house of David” (26)

He who did not fear the power of Rehoboam, fears that Rehoboam may forsake his violence, and attempt to draw the people to himself through compassion during the days of feasts, and make them long to return to the house of David.

“If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, then the heart of these people will turn back to their Lord, Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and turn back to Rehoboam king of Judah. Therefore the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt” (27-28)

Ahijah had previously prophesied about the enthronement of Jeroboam even before the enthronement of Rehoboam. It was therefore befitting of Jeroboam to trust in God who set him a king, and not to fear the return of the house of David, and plots human plans with the spirit of rebellion against God. He drew the hearts of the people away from the temple of God, who raised him up to the throne, and destroyed His commandments and statutes. He brought the people several centuries back; by making for them two Egyptian calves to worship God under that symbol, the way the Egyptians did in their worship of the calf Ibis.

Not being able to build a huge temple like that of Solomon, with everything overlaid with gold, All he could do was to make two golden calves.

He set the two calves to destroy the principle of the unity of the Godhead, by which he opened the door before the entrance of the multitude of gods in idol-worship. As it came

in Hosea 8: 11, Ephraim made several altars for sin; he chose Dan in the far North, and Bethel in the far South, to put the two golden calves; as though those calves are the guardians and protectors of the kingdom. He chose Bethel, close to the frontier of the kingdom of Judah, with the intention to seduce some of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to partake of that new worship.

In a letter to St. Gregory, the wonder-maker, the scholar Origen wrote about the fleeing of Jeroboam from the face of Solomon to Egypt, where he ate the bread of the Egyptians, then came back to split and divide the kingdom of Israel, and to set two golden calves for the people to worship (in the northern kingdom), saying to them: *"Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt"* (28). When he was attached to king Solomon, namely, to the divine wisdom, Jeroboam did not divert to the idol-worship; but when he went down to Egypt, as though to the temporal philosophies, and to the foreign thoughts, he came back to split the church by the heresys, to take its unity away, and to provoke the multitude to turn away from the worship of the living God. We cannot deny that some had drawn benefit from the philosophies, and used them for ministering to God; but many have, as well, stumbled by them, and caused others to stumble, denying them of the spiritual church life.

Commenting on God's talk to Jacob before descending to Egypt, saying, *"Joseph will put his hands over your eyes"* (Genesis 46: 4), the scholar Origen says that it was a prophecy that was realized by setting the two golden calves by the tribe of Joseph (Benjamin) who put their hands over the eyes of Israel, deceiving and blinding them to the knowledge of the truth. And as it is said in Micah: *"All this is for the transgression of Jacob, and the sins of the house of Israel.. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria?"* (Micah 1: 5). By putting his hands on Jacob's eyes, Joseph causing him not to be able to see his transgressions and to confess them.

Jeroboam attempted to make the two calves in the shape of the cherubim to deceive the people.

- + Miserable are the people who turn away from God. ... As to our peace, we now enjoy with God by faith, then will enjoy seeing it eternally by our own eyes.

(St. Augustine)

“And he set one up in Behel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high place, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi” (29-31)

He made priests from every class of people to gain favor among the people, taking into consideration that some Levis refused to submit to him and practice priesthood at the altars which he built.

Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. . So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense” (32-33)

He replaced the feast of the tabernacles by the fifteenth day of the eighth month, instead of the eighteenth day of the seventh month, apparently on account of that the harvest in the north comes at a later date; Whereas the real reason, was not to be bound by the statutes which were followed in Judah.

By ordaining himself a high priest, particularly in the feast days; by practicing the priestly work; and by ordaining priests as he wishes; he intended to have the religious, together with the civil authority.

Jeroboam did not perceive that the essence of worship is to encounter and acquire God; and thought of it as mere practices that bring pleasure to God and men.

- +` Many give different answers to where the happy life abides. Yet, why would we go to many teachers, or care to give many answers to this question?; when it came concise and true in the Holy Book, saying: "*Blessed are the people whose Lord is God*".

(St. Augustine)

- + You created us for Your sake.
And our heart would stay uncomfortable until it finds comfort in You.
Who can grant me peace of mind in You?
To whom shall I resort to get the gift of Your dwelling in my heart; to forget all the transgressions that I have committed;
And embrace You alone, my only Goodness?

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS !2

**GIVE ME, O LORD, THE SPIRIT OF DISCERNMENT
KEEP MY SOUL FROM GETTING HAUGHTY TOGETHER WITH REHOBOAM**

- + Solomon the Sage, begat Rehoboam the foolish;
He who foolishly rejected the counsel of the wise elders;
And followed the arrogance of the young men;
Thinking of the authority as violence, and just giving orders;
Instead of serving his people, he got haughty on them;
And instead of the kind word he spoke to them harshly;
By that he lost ten tribes, and divided the kingdom in two.

- + Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of humility;
Let me listen to the wise and edifying counsel;
Let me desire ministering to others, and not just to have the authority over them;
For by the kind word, I would quench the fire of anger;

- + Jeroboam the rebel was given to reign over ten tribes;
Yet, instead of offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God who chose him;
He made two golden calves;
He replaced Jerusalem, the city of God, with Bethel and Dan;
He corrupted the priesthood, and distorted the worship of the true God

- + Until when, shall I, O Lord, pay Your gifts back with denial?
Until when, shall I replace Your divine wisdom with human wisdom?
Until when, shall I be preoccupied with human worships, away from Your divine sanctuaries?

- + Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of discernment;
That my soul would not get haughty like Rehoboam the son of Solomon;
And would not bear denial and betrayal like Jeroboam.

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CHAPTER 13

JEROBOAM'S HAND GETS WITHERED (PARALYZED)

This chapter reveals to us the longsuffering of God and His impartiality. He sent a man of God to Jeroboam who brought the idol-worship into the new divided kingdom. God chose Jeroboam to chastise Rehoboam, but being, himself, unfaithful, God sent to him a prophet from Judah to warn him against his apostasy from the Lord, and to chastise him. The hand that stretched to destroy the worship of the true God, got withered; Yet the amazing thing in God's longsuffering, was that when the king showed remorse, he was forgiven, and his withered hand healed.

The man sent by the Lord to warn the king was commanded not to eat nor drink in that location. Obeying God's command, he could perform miracles; but when he disobeyed through the seduction of another, a lion devoured him. God has no partiality, He chastises whomever commits sin, whether a king or a prophet.

1- Jeroboam's hand gets withered	1 - 5
2- Jeroboam shows remorse	6
3- The man of God refrains from eating	7 - 9
4- The man of God devoured by a lion	10 - 24
5- The man of God buried	25 - 32
6- Jeroboam persists on evil	33 – 34

1- JEROBOAM'S HAND GETS WITHERED: (1 – 5)

"And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense." (1)

Jeroboam knew for sure that what he was doing constituted an opposition against the divine truth, and a disobedience to the commandment; Yet, as he ordained himself by himself, and started his work as a high priest by burning incense on the altar, the Lord sent to him a prophet from Judah to warn him by a clear sign, so that he would have no excuse.

" Then he (the man of God) cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord and said, 'O altar, altar! Thus says

*the Lord, Behold, a child, Josiah by name shall be born to the house of David,
and on you he shall sacrifice
the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall
be burned on you” (2)*

The man of God did not whisper what the Lord said concerning the king, but courageously he cried out loudly. He did not deceive the king, nor fear him, or shamefully refrain to proclaim God's message to him. The man of God did not fear the power of the king; for he who fears God fears no man whatever is his power or authority.

+ The fear of God is the guardian for practicing the commandments; It is the fruit of the sound faith.

(Father Oghris)

+ The fear of God exhorts the soul to keep the commandments of God; through which the house of the soul is established.

We wish, therefore, to fear God, and to establish houses for ourselves, to find a resort in the time of winter, against the cold and rain; for those who have no houses to protect them, would face great risks.

+ **According to the fathers we can acquire the fear of God:**

- a- If we remember death and sufferings;
- b- If we ask ourselves every evening, how we spent the day; and every morning, how we spent the night.
- c- If we refrain from being rude.
- d- If we care to have a relationship of friendship with someone who fears God. A brother once asked a hermit, saying: [What should I do, O father, to fear God?] To which the hermit answered: [Go and dwell with someone who fears God; for by his behavior, you will learn how to fear God].

We would drive the fear of God away from ourselves through doing what contradict with the previous things: when we do not remember death nor sufferings; When we do not

bring ourselves into account, how we spend our time, but live slothfully; When we befriend people in whom there is no fear of God; And when we walk in life in a rude way; which is the worst of all, for nothing would take away the fear of God from the soul like rudeness.

(Father Dorotheos)

With great zeal, the man of God intended to deliver the word of the Lord to the king, and to whoever were present of the elite men of the nation, and of the people; as it has been an important occasion to them all.

Yet, he did not address his talk to the king, nor to the statesmen, or to the people, but he addressed it to the stones, crying out: *"O altar, altar!"*. As the hearts of all were without sense toward the divine message, there was hope that the stones may hear more than the hearts of men. As the human hearts were closed to the divine message, he cried out to the stones, for they would probably listen and respond.

As Jeroboam assumed that his plan would surely succeed, that he and his descendants after him would find stability and security, and that the people would never again return to the kings of Judah; The man of God confirmed to him that evil would never endure, and God's plan had to be definitely realized. Hence, the man of God prophesied about Josiah, three and a half centuries before his birth, who will destroy the altars of idol-worship, and burn the bones of those who burn incense on them.

We often wrongly assume that evil is stronger and more enduring; but God confirms that it would only be for some time; then the light will come to scatter the darkness, and the truth will come to destroy the vanity. Idol-worship will surely come to an end; Whereas the Word of God will forever endure.

"And he gave a sign the same day, saying, 'This is the sign which the Lord had spoken: Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes on it shall be poured out'" (3)

God confirmed His message with a sign; which is shaking the altar, splitting it apart, and pouring out the ashes on it. By such a sign everyone would be sure of the identity of the one who spoke to them as a man of God; and that God would find no pleasure in sacrifices offered on a defiled altar, unable to sanctify the sacrifice. On another aspect, if their hearts have turned into stone like

their idols; the Word of God alone is capable to shake these hearts of stone, and to pour out what clang to them of the ashes of defilement.

“So it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, who cried out against the altar in Bethel, that he stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, ‘Arrest him’. Then his hand which he stretched out toward him withered, so that he could not pull it back to himself” (4)

Caring for Jeroboam, God sent the man of God to warn him. While God stretched His hand to Rehoboam with love, in the hope that he may repent and return to Him, Jeroboam paid God's love back with arrogance, stretched his hand, not to put it in God's stretched hand, but to oppose Him. Instead of presenting repentance, he increased his foolishness, thinking that he could take hold of the man of God and kill him. God did not allow for Jeroboam's hand to wither while stretching to burn incense; but allowed it to be, when it stretched to take hold of the man of God. For any opposition against His men, God counts it as directed against Him personally. He does not allow for the rod of the wicked to come down on the portion of the righteous (Psalm 125: 3). He warned, saying: *“Do not touch My anointed ones”* (1 Chronicles 16: 22; Psalm 105: 15).

- + Here, we have a perfect example: In one single person, both the mercies, as well as the wrath of God appeared. When Jeroboam's right hand suddenly withered, as he stretched it to arrest the man of God; and once he showed remorse, he was forgiven on the spot.

(St. Ambrose)

- + Sin is a real running wild, and a corruption by man; a diversion away from the exalted Creator, and a descent to a lesser level of creation.

(St. Augustine)

“The altar also was split apart, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord” (5)

God gave Jeroboam more than one chance to return from his evil, yet, because of his persistence on corruption, all things turned to his

perdition. As *"All things work together for good to those who love God"* (Romans 8: 28), all things will turn to the perdition of the wicked who persists on his evil. God gave Jeroboam ten tribes, sent to him a prophet from Judah to warn him; allowed for the split of the altar, and the pouring out of the ashes on it; and healed his withered hand when he showed remorse. Yet all those things have become a testimony against him to judge him, because he did not benefit from the longsuffering of God, but misused it.

2- JEROBOAM SHOWS REMORSE: (6)

"Then the king answered and said to the man of God, 'Please entreat the favor of the Lord your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me'. So the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king's hand was restored to him, and became as it was before" (6)

God who wounds is alone able to heal the wounds. The man of God did not bear the spirit of revenge, but with love, he paid the evil of the king back with goodness, opening before him the way of hope in the Lord, the true Physician of the soul and the body.

The king enjoyed healing of his withered hand through returning to God, and seeking the intercession of the man of God on his behalf; For God listens to His children: He responded to Moses' request for the sake of Pharaoh (Exodus 10: 17); to Job's request for the sake of his oppressive friends; And to the request of the man of God, here, for the sake of Jeroboam; his persecutor (Matthew 5: 10).

The king invited the man of God to eat in his house, and to accept a reward, but the man of God rejected his invitation, even if he gave him half of his kingdom; a firm decision instructed by the Lord Himself, not to have a fellowship with the wicked. Despite being most probably exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and having no money to buy food for himself; he rejected the king's invitation and reward. According to the human way of thinking, he could have accepted the king's invitation, to have a chance for a longer chat, through which the king might present a true repentance, and return to God; But he did not do such a thing, in obedience of the command of the Lord, who is wiser than men. As a messenger he obeyed the One who sent him.

In His longsuffering, God wishes for the salvation of the sinners, and not for their perdition. Despite knowing beforehand that Jeroboam will resume offering sacrifices to the idols; yet, when

he presented repentance God forgave him and healed his withered hand. He did not allow for him to die on the spot, with the hope that he might repent and live. God desires the salvation of all.

3- THE MAN OF GOD REFRAINS FROM EATING: (7-9)

"Then the king said to the man of God, 'Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward" (7)

According to some, this was an invitation from the king to the prophet to be a priest with him, a handsome and seductive reward for the sake of healing his withered hand. But the divine command to the man of God, was not to return the same way he came; First, as a practical test for his obedience to God; and on another aspect, to avoid any chance for someone to recognize, and harm him for rebuking the king, and rejecting his invitation to go home with him, and eat on his royal table.

*"But the man of God said to the king, 'If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you,
nor would I eat bread or drink water in this place. For so it was commanded me by the word of the Lord,
saying, 'You shall not eat bread nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came'" (8-9).*

In the sight of God, keeping His commandment or obeying Him is far better than acquiring half of Jeroboam's kingdom.. So the believer sees the divine commandment, not as an object for debate or for discussion, but rather as a chance of an encounter of love, that would satisfy his whole being. He see it, not as a deprivation from a certain pleasure, nor a suppression of a particular feeling; but in it he sees a kind of pleasure that surpasses any other pleasure in the whole world. In it he sees an acquirement of all good gifts, and an enjoyment of the Creator of heaven and earth. The commandment satisfies his depths and rejoices his soul; It is his treasure which he tightly holds with his whole heart in his inner depths.

The psalmist says: *"How sweet are Your words to my taste; sweeter than honey to my mouth"* (Psalm 119: 103). The Word of God has a special sweetness, more than all the philosophies, knowledge, and wisdom of the world. There is a great difference between him who studies the Word of God in a human, dry and mental way, and him who feeds on it, to find it satisfying and sweet, sweeter than honey. It gives sweetness to the soul, and turns the dryness of our cruel hearts, into the sweetness of the wide and compassionate love. It is as though, in its sweetness,

the word of God turns the believer to the sweet life, that others will find it sweet to have fellowship with him.

- + In case man eats sour grapes, his teeth will stand on edge, that he would not be able to eat bread. So it will be if man feeds on an abundance of the defilement of this world, and plunged into vain talks of slander; he would then, despise and reject the sweet divine Scripture; that even if he reads it, he cannot say together with the prophet: *"How sweet are Your words to my taste, O Lord"* (Psalm 119: 103)
- + The sweetness of the Word of God will endure in us, if we plant it in others, through continuously repeating it with utter flowing love.

(Father Caesarius bishop of Arle)

- + Sometimes, certain verses of the Holy Scripture, has an increasing sweetness in the mouth (Psalm 119: 103); as when man repeats a simple phrase in his prayer several times without getting satisfied, nor moving to another phrase.

(Mar Isaac bishop of Nineveh)

- + It is the magic of the truth, expressed by the psalmist, saying, *"How sweet are your words to my taste; sweeter than honey to my mouth"* (Psalm 119: 103)

(St. Basil)

- + The words of God became sweet to me like honey; that I cried out loud seeking knowledge, and wisdom.

(St. Gregory the Neanzan)

- + *"Go to the bee and consider her wise ways and be wise"* . If you meditate in how it moves from one flower to another to collect nectar, you will then move between the holy books, will hold fast to your salvation; and once you get satisfied, you will say: *"How sweet are Your words to my taste; sweeter than honey in my mouth"*.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

According to St. John Chrysostom, only the sound and healthy soul will find sweetness in the word of God; For the sick does not feel the taste nor sweetness of the food.

- + Some may even not know that there are Holy Books; Hence, believe me, nothing sound, nor of benefit will come out of us.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Writing about the widow 'Furia', St. Jerome speaks of 'Deborah', as the bee that gathers the nectar from the flowers of the Holy Book. St.

Jerome says: [It is well to call her 'Deborah', for she feed on the flowers of the Book; has been surrounded by the sweet fragrance of the Holy Book; and gathers together, in unity with the prophetic healing, the sweet juice of nectar].

4-THE MAN OF GOD DEVoured BY A LION: (10 – 24)

"So he went another way and did not return by the way he came to Bethel. Now an old prophet dwelt in

Bethel, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel;

they also told their father the words which he had spoken to the king. And their father said to them,

'Which way did he go?' For his sons had seen which way the man of God went who came from Judah"

(10-12)

Many are the tricks and deceptions of the devil. The man of God could stand before the king, and with courage, refused to enter into his house and to sit at his table; and in obedience to God he did not return by the same way he came. However the devil did not let him enjoy the blessings he has got for the sake of his obedience, but sent someone to keep him from consummating the command of God; sent him an old deceiving and lying prophet, who gave him a counsel, falsely referring it to a heavenly proclamation.

That deceptive old prophet was probably raised in the school of prophets founded by the prophet Samuel; yet, through the seduction of the world, the spirit of prophecy forsook him; for it is befitting of the true prophets of God to be holy (2 Peter 1: 21). However, according to some, what

that deceptive prophet did, was in good faith, with the intention to offer food and drink to the hungry and exhausted man of God. But the prevailing view is that he was one of the false prophets who rejoice to see the fall of the true prophets.

He indeed did not partake of the idol-worship together with the king, and his sons, who went there, probably for the sake of curiosity and not to take a positive role; came back to tell him what took place. But their father was not faithful to the Lord. He dwelt in a heathen town, did not stand against the king, and did not testify to the truth.

As to the man of God, if he had the spirit of discernment between what is true and what is vain; that false prophet would not be able to deceive him.

+ Pray to God to grant you the grace of sound perception of all things, to be able to discern between good and evil.

According to the apostle Paul: *"But solid food belongs to those who are of full age"* (Hebrew 5: 14); Namely to those, who by persistent work and strife, have their senses and tendencies trained on discerning between the good and evil; hence counted as the children of the kingdom, and among the children of God, to whom God gives the good discernment, that no man or devil can deceive them.

The enemy fights against the believers under the pretension of doing good, and succeeds to deceive a multitude of those who lack the wisdom and good discernment. Hence the apostle taught about the riches and greatness of understanding; kept for the believers; writing in his epistle to the Ephesians: *"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of your calling; what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"* (Ephesians 1: 17, 18). He so wrote, motivated by his great and increasing love for them; and knowing that, in case they acquire the understanding, nothing would be difficult for them, nor fear would ever touch them, but will be comforted by the joy of the Lord, day and night; and all works would always be sweet to them.

Many monks and virgins in the monasteries, may indeed have such understanding to a certain degree. But if you intend to get it with perfection, you should flee away from those who bear the title of "monks and virgins" without having the true perception and the good discernment. For mixing with them will hinder your progress, and may quench your zeal; on account of that they, themselves coldly walk after their lusts. If they ever come to you to

speak of earthly things according to their own nature, do not listen to them; for the apostle Paul, knowing that nothing would quench the spirit like vain talking, counsels us, saying: *“Do not quench the spirit, and do not despise prophecies”* (1 Thessalonians 5: 19, 20);

(St. Abba Anthony)

“Then he said to his sons, ‘Saddle the donkey for me’. So they saddled the donkey for him, and he rode on it, and went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak. Then he said to him, ‘Are you the man of God who came from Judah?’. And he said, ‘I am’. Then he said to him, ‘Come home with me and eat bread;”

(13-15)

Refusing such an invitation was unacceptable in East, for it would bear the meaning of despise of the host. It was the custom when some stranger reaches a town, that one of its inhabitants receives him, offer him food, and a place to protect him against the weather and the attacks of thieves; and in that case, the guest, considered then as a member of the family that received him; or rather the guest of God, would partake of worshipping the god of the host.

“Then he said, ‘I cannot return with you nor go in with you, neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. For I have been told by the word of the Lord, ‘You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came’. He said to him, ‘I am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, ‘Bring him back with you in your house, that he may eat bread and drink water; But he lied to him”. (16-18)

According to some, that old prophet could not be a liar; but, as the word ‘angel’ could mean (a messenger); saying that an angel spoke to him by the word of the Lord (18), he might mean by it his two sons who came to him from the king's house and told him all what happened with the man of God; and that they wished to give him hospitality. Hence what he said was a reference to his two sons as being sent by the Lord to exhort him to give hospitality to the man of God; especially when he saw him sitting extremely exhausted, under the oak tree, and felt that he is in need for food and drink to sustain him. According to them, therefore, that old prophet was himself

deceived by the devil, that by reason of compassion he would seduce the man of God to disobey the command of God to him, saying that *"Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of life"* (2 Corinthians 11: 14). He deceives men, and provokes them to deceive others under the pretence of virtue.

Anyway, it was possible for the man of God to reveal the deception of that old prophet, on account of that, as the divine command came directly to him from God, there was no reason for it to be changed through a third party. And why did he not return to God to ask him before disobeying His command?

So both of them, the man of God and the old prophet were in need of the spirit of discernment; For if the old prophet was deceived under his desire to give hospitality to the exhausted man of God; the later had no excuse; for he came from Judah by a direct divine call, prophesied to the king, his prophecy was realized; on his hand the king's hand got withered, and on his hand it was healed; He was in need of the spirit of discernment between the truth and the vanity.

The spirit of discernment is the secure way; is the gift of the Holy Spirit who leads us along the royal path, leading to the bosom of the Father.

"So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water. Now it happened as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back"
(19-20)

"And he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying: 'Thus says the Lord, Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord, and have not kept the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you; but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the Lord said to you...' "(21)

It was "the word of the Lord" that cried out. It came to him first bearing the spirit of strength and conquest, and made him not fearful before the king and his men. Now, having disobeyed the commandment, the word of the Lord came to terrify him, and to dissolve his heart. It is the two-edged sword, that bears the spirit of strength to support, and to bring forth, as well, the divine chastisement.

“But you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the Lord said to you, ‘Eat no bread and drink no water’, Your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers. So it was after he has eaten bread, and after he drank, that he saddled the donkey for him; namely the prophet who brought him back. So when he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the corpse” (22-24)

The lion that devoured the man of God, came as a living testimony of the impartiality of God. In case someone sins against God, he will fall under the rod of chastisement.

What did happen was according to a divine command, and not by chance. The lion killed the man, did not devour him, nor came near the donkey; but it amazingly stood beside the corpse, as though watching upon it, together with the donkey. Here, the hand of God is obvious!

God allows for killing the body, to let all learn that disobedience leads to the death and perdition of the soul. Yet, the body not being devoured, reveals the longing of God to glorify man, body and soul, and not to be destroyed by corruption forever.

- + it is amazing that the lion that did not touch the donkey, did not let the man of God barely leave his table! ... He, who could perform miracles while fasting, once he ate, he had to pay back a penalty for the pleasure of eating; Hence the prophet Joel cries out loudly, saying: *“Consecrate a fast; Call a sacred assembly”* (Joel 2: 15; 1: 14 LXX); to show that fasting is consecrated by other works; and that the holy fast brings forth healing from sin.

(St. Jerome)

5- THE MAN OF GOD BURIED: (25-32)

“And there, men passed by and saw the corpse thrown on the road, and the lion standing by the corpse.

Then they went and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt. So when the prophet who had brought

him back from the way heard it, he said, ‘It is the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the

Lord. Therefore the Lord has delivered him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke to him. And he spoke to his sons, saying, 'Saddle the donkey for me', and they saddled it. Then he went and found the corpse thrown on the road, and the donkey and the lion standing by the corpse. The lion had not eaten the corpse nor torn the donkey" (25-28)

The Hebrews cared very much about being buried together with their fathers (Genesis 27: 30; 49: 29; 2 Samuel 19: 37 etc.)

"And the prophet took up the corpse of the man of God, laid it on the donkey and brought it back. So the old prophet came to the city to mourn and to bury him. Then he laid the corpse in his own tomb, then mourned over him, saying, 'Alas, my brother'. So it was after he had buried him, that he spoke to his sons, saying, 'When I am dead, then bury me in the tomb where the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones'" (29-31)

Although being a false prophet, yet the old prophet desired that when he is dead to be buried together with the man of God. Feeling guilty, and perceiving his responsibility for what happened to the man of God, he desired to be buried beside him, to be raised together with him.

"For the saying which he cried out by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel, and against all the shrines on the high places which are in the cities of Samaria" (32)

Although Samaria was not yet built by Omri (1 kings 16: 24); the prophet, by the spirit of prophecy referred to it; the same way the man of God referred to Josiah by name three and a half centuries before his birth.

6-JEROBOAM PERSISTS ON HIS EVIL: (33-34)

“After the event, Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but again he made priests from every class of people for the high places; whoever wished he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing was the sin of the house of Jeroboam, so as to exterminate and destroy it from the face of the earth: (33-34)

God presented to Jeroboam every way, in the hope that he would return from the evil he practiced; But he did not benefit from any of them:

- Instead of offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God who let him reign over ten tribes, he diverted the people to idol-worship
- He did not listen to the man of God who came from Judah to warn him, but intended to kill him
- The prophecy said by the man of God was realized, the altar was split, and the ashes on it was poured out; but Jeroboam's heart was not shaken before the word of God.
- Although he enjoyed the healing of his withered hand, his heart was not healed of its spiritual paralysis.
- Although he heard about the death of the man of God, as a result of his disobedience to a commandment that seemed minor to him, yet Jeroboam did not return from his evil ways.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 13

WHO WILL HEAL MY WITHERED HAND?

WHO WILL SAVE ME FROM THE HARDNESS OF MY HEART?

- + You set Jeroboam a king; and the foolish man denied Your love;
Instead of offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving, he set two golden calves contrary to the commandment;
In Your love, You sent him a prophet from Judah to shake the altar;
But in his foolishness, stretching his hand to threaten the man of God, it was paralyzed;
He prayed to You, and You healed it
Yet he persisted on his stone-like heart

In obedience, the man of God refused to eat with the king, nor to accept his gift;
Then, deceived by a false old prophet, he disobeyed the commandment;
And, for his disobedience, he was killed by a lion on the road.

- + Take the denial off my heart; to give You thanks for setting me a king?
No golden calf will ever enter into my heart;
But You will dwell in my depths;

- + Grant me a gentle heart, that would never disregard Your warnings;
So that my hand would not stretch to do evil, and lose its activity;
Let me, together with that man of God, reject evil;
And never desire all the riches of the world;
Let Your commandment stay engraved in my heart;
Let it be portrayed before my sight;
For Your commandment carries me along the royal path;
It keeps me against the devil, the ferocious lion;
It heals my wounds, and renews my heart.

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CHAPTER 14

THE DEATH OF ABIJAH, THE SON OF JEROBOAM

As the kingdom was divided into the two kingdom of Judah and Israel, the book of the kings presents to us a living portrait of the corruption that dwelt on them; although there were certain reforming kings in the kingdom of Judah.

In the present chapter, we are told about one of the fruits of corruption that dwelt upon Israel; and about the robbery of the treasury of the temple in Judah.

1-The illness of Abijah, the son of Jeroboam	1 - 6
2- Ahjah's prophecy concerning bringing disaster on the house of Jeroboam	7 - 16
3-The death of Abijah, the son of Jeroboam	17 - 18
4-The death of Jeroboam	19 - 20
5-The evil committed by Rehoboam and Judah	21 - 24
6- Robbing the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the king's house in Judah	25 - 31

1-THE ILLNESS OF ABIJAH, THE SON OF JEROBOAM: (1 – 6)

Jeroboam did not learn from the lesson presented to him by the Lord on the hand of the man of God who came from Judah; and prophesied that the altar shall split apart, the ashes on it shall be poured out; and when the king's hand, that stretched to harm the man of God, got withered, then healed by the prayers of the man of God. Now God allowed for a harsher chastisement, namely, the sickness of his own son; and having shown no repentance, God allowed for the son's death; and the prophet Ahijah prophesied about taking the kingdom away from Jeroboam's house. The same prophet who delivered a divine promise with a condition to Jeroboam, now takes that promise back for his failure to realize the condition; namely for the unfaithfulness of Jeroboam.

*At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam became sick; and Jeroboam said to his wife,
'Please arise and disguise
yourself, that they may not recognize you as the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh.
Indeed Ahijah the prophet*

is there, who told me I would be king over this people. Also take with you ten loaves, some cakes, and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what will become of the child" (1-3)

Calling his son 'Abijah', meaning (Jehovah is my Father) or (my desire), Jeroboam had the intention to stay bound to the Lord his God; but his desire to establish his kingdom away from Jerusalem and the temple there, got the upper hand on him, and led him to diversion and unfaithfulness to God.

In Jeroboam's request to his wife to go to Shiloh to meet Ahijah the prophet concerning the sickness of his son, we notice the following:

- (1) Although he confessed that this prophet was the one who told him that he would be king over this people; yet he did not confess that he sinned to God who chose him to reign. It was befitting of him while remembering the gift of God, to give thanks to Him, together with the spirit of repentance and obedience.
- (2) He asked her to disguise her appearance; when it was befitting of both of them not to change their appearance, but to change their hearts, minds, and behavior. Asking her to change her appearance, probably meant to keep the people from knowing that he resorts to the prophet, for fear that they would forsake the idol-worship, follow his lead, and resort to the man of God as he did; who would exhort them to return to God. And Jeroboam probably assumed that Ahijah may refuse to meet her, on account of his anger because of his apostasy away from God. His request to his wife to change her appearance, therefore, reveals his perception of the extent of what he committed of disobedience to the Lord, and of his diversion from His worship. Yet he did not think of the only sound practical treatment of his situation. How foolish he was!
He assumed that God could reveal to His prophet what would become of the child, but unable to reveal the identity of his disguised wife.
- (3) As the prophet Ahijah prophesied to Jeroboam the good news that he would reign over this people, he assumed that he would always carry such good news; not perceiving that a prophet only utters what God proclaims to him, whether good or bad news.

We marvel how the king sent his own wife to the prophet, on account of that she, would care enough for her sick child; beside his fear that any of his men would probably deceive him, and

bring false report from the prophet. That is how it would be when someone diverts from the way of truth, he would doubt all those around him, for they are all deceptive like him.

It was the custom of kings to honor the prophet and to give him befitting gifts; but intending to disguise herself as a poor woman from among the common people, and not the queen, she took to him such simple gifts. Ahijah has previously rejected Jeroboam's gifts as the prophet Alijah did when he rejected those of Hazael (2 Kings 13); counting those gifts as filthy as the price of a dog, or the wages of a prostitute, that would never be fitting to enter into the house of the Lord, according to God's statutes. That is why the laws of the apostles warns the bishop against receiving the gifts and the offerings of the wicked; the way St. Peter rejected the money of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8).

"And Jeroboam's wife did so; she arose and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were glazed by reason of his age. Now the Lord had said to Ahijah, 'Here is the wife of Jeroboam coming to ask you something about her son, for he is sick. Thus and thus you shall say to her; for it will be when she comes in, that she will pretend to be another woman'. And so it was, when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps, as she came through the door, he said, 'Come in, wife of Jeroboam; Why do you pretend to be another person?, for I have been sent to you with bad news'" (4-6)

Although Ahijah lost his ability to see because of old age, yet he enjoyed the inner insight, by which he could recognize the identity of the disguised queen, who intended to enquire about what will become of her son, without telling him her true identity; for fear that he would talk to her about the diversion of her husband. Yet she heard bad news, coming directly from God Himself, something she feared to hear without the desire to solve.

As it was a bitter moment to know how her deception was exposed; So it will be when the garment of hypocrisy, that bears the image and not the power of holiness, is taken off from the wicked; and their deceptive works are exposed before the divine Judge, the heavenly hosts, and all believers. God will judge us, according to our hearts, and not according to our outer appearance.

Although Ahijah's eyes were unable to recognize the queen, but his ears, well trained on hearing the voice of God, heard the queen's footsteps, and recognized her identity. Whoever trains his eyes on the vision of God, and his ears on listening to His voice, no one can deceive; for God reveals to him the hidden things; though not absolutely, but what is for his edification, and that of others.

God allowed for the chastisement to dwell upon the son whom the king hoped to inherit the throne after him. We can say that the sickness of Abijah was the last gift presented by the mercy of the Lord to Jeroboam, with the hope that through the chastisement upon the dearest person to him, he would probably return to himself, and present repentance to regain the mercy of the Lord.

2- AHIJAH'S PROPHECY CONCERNING BRINGING DISASTER ON THE HOUSE OF JEROBOAM: (7-16)

"Go, tell Jeroboam, 'Thus says the Lord, God of Israel: 'Because I exalted you from among the people, and made you ruler over my people Israel" (7)

God calls Himself "The Lord God of Israel". ... Having given the Lord his back, He is no more his God; yet God still seeks His own people, and refers Himself to them, in the hope that they would probably return from idol-worship; as He has not yet issued a document of their divorce, because of their adultery.

"and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you; and yet you have not been as My servant

David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only what was right in My eyes" (8)

"But you have done more evil than all who were before you, for you have gone and made for yourself other gods and

molded images, to provoke me to anger, and have cast me behind your back" (9)

God reminds Jeroboam of His generous divine gifts, which he paid back with denial and apostasy from Him. He set him a king, and could have kept his house secure if he was faithful to his covenant with God; But he committed more evil than who were before him. ... Saul, David and Solomon, have all sinned, but Jeroboam was the worst of them.

Jeroboam did not follow the lead of David, who, although have sinned once, yet he knew the way to repentance, and returned to God with his whole heart.

The divine voice came to rebuke Jeroboam; for Jeroboam did not follow the lead of king David: Although both have got a divine promise to have the throne, but there is a great difference between the two men.

- + David had a thanksgiving heart even in the midst of affliction, singing: *"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth"* (Psalm 24: 1).

According to St. Augustine: [The Lord Christ became man for this specific goal; namely, that man would become like an angel, crying out: *"I will bless the Lord ..."*. You are committed to bless Him when He gives you gifts; and bless Him when He takes them back from you. For, although He is the One who gives and the One who takes; Yet He would never take "Himself" from those who bless Him. Only the meek bless the Lord at all times, the meekness that the Lord taught us in His body and blood, given up for our sake; by which He set an example before our eyes].

And according to Pope Athanasius the apostolic: [The way the meek David blessed the Lord in the time of his affliction, saying: *"I bless the Lord at all times"*; So did the apostle Paul, who did not cease to give thanks to God in all his epistles. In his time of comfort, as well as in his time of affliction, he did not cease to bless and glorify the Lord; knowing that *"tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character hope; Now hope does not disappoint"* (Romans 5: 3). I wish we, as well, followers of those saints, will not cease to give thanks to God at all times; for, according to St. Gregory the Nezenzen: [Our thanksgiving to God is more important than our breathing; Everything has its time, as Solomon teaches us, and as I also believe; but thanksgiving is due at all times].

- + David did not seek the kingdom, but his desire was to serve the people of God; Whereas Jeroboam, seeking it with every human way, provoked Solomon to have him killed; and he fled to Egypt.
- + Jeroboam intended to establish his throne, not by godliness, but through setting two centers of worship; even if it is against the commandment of God.

"Therefore, behold I will bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel,

bond and free, and I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone" (10)

Having hidden her face by a veil, God revealed to His prophet, not only her face to recognize her, but what is in her heart, as well, to present to her and her husband a serious divine message.

Jeroboam became a serious example of the denying heart; and to St. Erinaos, an example of whoever split the church and destroys her unity. to get from God the same punishment on Jeroboam.

"The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field, for the Lord has spoken it" (11)

Having reproached God, his reproach came back upon him, as well as upon his household, that their corpses would become food for the dogs and the bird of the air; both of which are very common in the Near East

While for the righteous, death is a divine gift; For the wicked it is something horrible. Hence it is said: *"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his"* (Numbers 23: 10).; and, *"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me"* Psalm 23: 4); and, *"Blessed is the man whom You chose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts forever"* (Psalm 65: 4)

- + *"There are no pangs in their death"* (Psalm 73: 4). After we labor hard, and get greatly preoccupied in doing something, we choose to lie down and have rest; But the wicked who have committed horrible iniquities, will never lie down and have rest; about whom it is written: *"Pour out Your indignation upon them; and let Your wrathful anger take hold of them"* (Psalm 69: 24). For those who do not get attached to Christ, will not raise themselves up to heavens; *"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection"* (Romans 6: 5); and. *"The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; and sustain him on his sickbed"* (Psalm 41: 3).

(St. Ambrose)

"Arise therefore, go to your own house. When your feet enter the city, the child will die. And all Israel shall mourn"

for him and bury him, for he is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam” (12, 13)

Saul, the first king of Israel sinned, yet he did not worship the idols, nor made his people do....
King David sinned, yet he presented repentance and returned to God. ... And Solomon sinned, and built high places for his women, yet he did not make his people partake of idol-worship. But Jeroboam made the two golden calves; brought the hearts of the people back to the land of servitude, where the calf ‘Ebis’ was worshipped; and did his best to keep them from going up to Jerusalem to worship the true God.

Because in Abijah the son of Jeroboam something good was found, although his heart was not completely with God, God gave him mercy by his death, to be buried in honor, and not in shame and reproach like his father and the rest of the family. For death in the time of evil is counted as a gift from God, who takes the face of the righteous away from evil.

According to some Jewish scholars the people of Israel mourned for Abijah on account of that he stood against his father when he set the two golden calves; and of that he often helped those who intended to go up to Jerusalem for worship.

“Moreover the Lord will raise up for himself a king over Israel who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam; This is the day, even now . For the Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which he gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their wooden images, provoking the Lord to anger” (14, 15)

Jeroboam cast the Lord behind his back, disregarded the divine presence, despised the divine commandment and the fear of the Lord;
And preferred his political ambitions with human mind to the kingdom of God.

As Moses has warned the people that God will uproot them from the promised land in case they disobey Him (Deuteronomy 29: 27); That was

the first time that warning was repeated. If God, by a strong hand and a mighty arm has delivered to them a land already preoccupied by great nations; Now their sin makes them like reed shaken in the water, and they will be taken away captives to Assyria (2 Kings 15: 29; 17: 23; 18: 11).

“And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and made Israel sin” (16)

3-THE DEATH OF ABIJAH THE SON OF JEROBOAM: (17-18)

*“Then Jeroboam’s wife arose and departed, and came to Tirzah. When she came to the threshold of the house,
the child died. And they buried, and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke
through His servant Ahijah the prophet” (17, 18)*

The prophet presented to her a clear sign, to assure her and her husband of the truth of what he prophesied, in the hope that she and her husband would probably return back from what they did. He spoke to her about things of the future, that Jeroboam’s house will be destroyed, And presented to her some fast action, that she would never see her son alive; for once she comes to the threshold of the city, her son will die.

Jeroboam has already moved his capital from Shechem to Tirzah, one of the ancient beautiful Canaanite cities (Joshua 12: 24). In the midst of mountain, about 9 miles far from Shechim (Nables); that city was probably a recreation resort for the king, more than being the capital of the state; and remained as such until Omri built Samaria (1 Kings 16: 23). Before the captivity, this city appeared again as the city of Menahem who murdered Shallum and replaced him (2 Kings 15: 14).

The queen went back to Tirzah, known for its beauty (Songs 16: 4); but the death of her son denied her the enjoyment of the beauty of the location. Tirzah, most probably is Talluza, north of Shechem (Joshua 12: 24).

There is a great difference between the entrance of Jeroboam’s wife into the city, and the entrance of the Virgin St. Mary into the city of Judah (Luke 1: 39). Once the feet of Jeroboam’s wife enter the city, her son died and grief dwelt upon the royal household and all Israel; Whereas,

once the feet of the Virgin St. Mary entered the house of Zechariah, the priest, Elizabeth's babe exulted in her womb, she was filled with the Holy Spirit, and her tongue together with her heart praised God.

While Jeroboam's wife came back carrying bitter news and harsh chastisement; The Virgin St. Mary carried good news for the whole world.

The children of darkness provoke the spirit of bitterness into humanity; Whereas the children of light, presenting the Lord Christ the source of joy; provoke the spirit of praise and exultation; and open the door of hope before all.

I wish, in our visits to others, we carry to them our holy Christ to bring gladness to their inner beings, to ignite His Holy Spirit in them, to exult their souls by Him; Instead of carrying to them evil thoughts and judgmental words, that fill them with the spirit of darkness, and quench the spirit inside them.

4-THE DEATH OF JEROBOAM: (19-20)

"Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he made war, and how he reigned, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. The period that Jeroboam reigned was 22 years. So he rested with his fathers. Then Nadab his son reigned in his place" (19, 20)

Jeroboam died (2 Chronicles 13: 20), struck by a serious illness by the Lord. He reigned 22 years; and died miserable after losing his son whom he hoped to reign after him.

5-THE EVIL COMMITTED BY REHOBOAM AND JUDAH: (21-24)

"And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was 41 years old when he became king. He reigned 17 years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord has chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there, His mother's name was Naama, an Ammonitess" (21). Now Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed more than all that their fathers have done" (22)

God allowed for the kingdom of Israel to be torn apart because of the foolishness and violence of Rehoboam; Now He allows for the house of Rehoboam to be torn apart, for he committed greater evils. It was befitting of him to follow the lead of king David, who, although have sinned, yet he enjoyed the divine promises and exalted gifts through his true repentance.

“For they also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree” (23)

Although many leaders of the people in the past sinned, whether judges or kings, yet none of them pushed the people with all his strength to idol-worship; And even if idol-worship sometimes crawled in, no judges nor kings made it the official worship of the people. Now, not only Israel but Judah as well built for themselves high places, sacred pillars and wooden images, on every high hill and under every green tree. They practiced idol-worship side by side with their worship of God in the temple. They chose the tops of the high hills, to draw the attention of the surrounding locations; and held them under every green tree on the road, to make it handy for the travelers who happen to take rest on the road.

“And there were also perverted persons in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel” (24)

That was realized when ‘Baasha’ killed all males in the house of Jeroboam (1 kings 29; 15: 28)

6- ROBBING THE TREASURES OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD AND THE TREASURES OF THE KING’S HOUSE:: (25-31)

“Now it happened in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem” (25)

Called ‘Sousakim’ in the Septuagint version, and ‘Aesonchosis’ by Jusabius; It came in the Egyptian documents that ‘Sheshonk’ (945-924 B.C.), the founder of the twenty-second dynasty, was the most serious outside enemy to invade the land of Israel since the days of king Saul; And in the temple of Karnak are images of the conquest of Egypt over Judah. Shishak’ always boasted that he caused troubles to the king of Judah; A study of his engravings in Karnak, indicates that out of 15 cities fortified by Rehoboam at the beginning of his reign (2 Chronicles 11: 5-12), the following three were taken over by Shishak:: Shoco, Adoraim, and Aijalon; beside two

other cities of Judah or Benjamin. After that he took over a great number of cities under Jeroboam, whether ex-Canaanite, or of the Levites. In the four years following the dissension, Rehoboam had great dominion over his competitor Jeroboam. When some of the ex-Cannanite, and Levites cities rebelled against Jeroboam, the later resorted to Shishak to support him to submit those cities; which he completely did.

In the temple of Karnak, there is an engraving of more than 130 armor-covered persons, led with their hands tied behind their backs; by god Ammon, and god Muth; symbolizing the fortified cities taken over by the king. Under one of them was engraved 'Yodeh-Malek' (King of Judah); which, according to some does not literally mean (king of Judah), but rather the name of a Palestinian city, unknown to us.

"And he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he took away everything. He also took away all the gold shields which Solomon had made" (26)

The people of Judah used to keep their jewelry and precious things, either buried under ground, or deposited in the temple; that was like a general treasury bank of Israel. Shishal took all of them away.

"Then king Rehoboam made bronze shields in their place, and committed them to the hands of the captains of the guards, who guarded the doorway of the king's house" (27)
"And so it was, whenever the king went into the house of the Lord, that the guards carried them, then brought them back into the guard chamber" (28)

There were probably 300 guards according to the number of shields.

"Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah" (29)
"And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days" (30)

That was realized until Samaria fell in the year 722 on the hand of the Assyrians; and Jerusalem fell in the year 586/5 on the hand of the Babylonians.

"So Rehoboam rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. His mother's name was

'Naamah', an Ammonitess. Then Abijam his son reigned in his place" (31)

For the second time the name of the queen mother was mentioned, as an indication of her personal influence upon her son the king, and his government. Two queen mothers appeared in Judah with such a great role (1 kings 15: 13; 2 kings 11: 1-20).

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 Kings 14

LET THE HOUSE OF JEROBOAM BE SCATTERED AND LET REHOBOAM LOSE HIS AUTHORITY

- + Jeroboam's wife assumed that she could disguise her identity before the prophet Ahijah;
He, to whom the future is not hidden;
He who previously prophesied that her husband will be a king;
She came to inquire from him about what will happen to her sick son;
And disregarded the people who were ill because of her husband;
He who cast the Lord behind his back, and provoked the people to evil;
Behold, her son will die, once her feet enter the city;
And the Lord will destroy Jeroboam's house in disgrace and reproach.
- + Rehoboam the son of Solomon walked along the way of his Ammonitess mother
Behold, Shishak king of Egypt robs the treasuries of Jerusalem;
Jeroboam and Rehoboam in continuous wars;
Both of them hated the Lord, and loved evil
- + How should I assume that I can disguise myself before the men of God?
Let me return to God with my whole heart, to heal my sick soul;
To bring me forth into my holy city; and be no more in reproach;
Let me give the Lord the face and not the back;
So that I would live, and so would my family;
So that I would enjoy the Lord, the secret of my life, together with my beloved.
- + No foreigner can enter into my holy Jerusalem;

No enemy can touch the treasures of my soul;
For they are in the hand of my Savior, my Keeper, and my shield;
Peace dwells in my depths, and my soul exults by the joy of heaven.

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CHAPTER 15

THE REFORMS OF ASA

This chapter reveals the behavior of the kings of Judah, who, at the beginning have not reached the evil of the kings of Israel. It presents to us two kings of Judah: the wicked Abijam, who reigned only a short period of time; and Asa, whose reigning days were good and long. It presents to us, as well, two wicked kings of Israel: Nadab the son of Jeroboam, and Baasha who scattered the house of Jeroboam.

1- Abijam the son of Rehoboam, an evil king, reigns over Judah	1 - 8
2- Asa the son of Abijam, the reformer	9 - 15
3- A treaty between Asa and Ben-Hadad against Israel	16 - 22
4- Illness and death of Asa	23 - 24
5- Nadab the son of Jeroboam, the evil king	25 - 28
6- Baasha destroys all the house of Jeroboam	29 - 34

1- ABIJAM THE SON OF REHOBOAM , THE EVIL KING: (1 – 8)

It presents a concise summary of the short reign of Abijam the son of Rehoboam; who, although he walked in the sins of his father; yet, in him there was found a glimpse of light; that, for the sake of his father David, God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, by setting his son Asa to reign after him, a good man, who started by some reforms, although he fell into some serious weaknesses.

The second book of Chronicles 13, mentioned the exalted conquest of Abijam the son of Rehoboam over Jeroboam, with the help of God. When speaking about him, being attached to God, the book of Chronicles called him Abijah, binding his name to Jehovah. But here, speaking about his sins, he is called Abijam. According to some, his name was originally Abijam, then changed by the Jews to Abijah, to refer him to Jehovah; Whereas, according to others, his real name was Abijah, meaning (Jehovah is my father or my desire); yet, because of his evil, the Jews called him Abijam, meaning (father of the sea); to deny him the reference to Jehovah; the same way they changed the name of the city of 'Bethel' to 'Beth Aven' in Hosea (5: 8); and Jehoahaz to Ahaz (2 kings 15: 38).

God stopped the war between the two kingdoms (1 Kings 12: 24), but because of the many persistent troubles caused by Jeroboam on the border, Abijah had to defend his kingdom; resorting to God to support him; and when Jeroboam was overcome, he retreated and kept his peace the rest of his reign (2 Chronicles 13: 20).

"Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nabat, Abijah became king over Judah. He

reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maachah the granddaughter of Abishalom.

And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; his heart was not loyal to

the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David" (1-3)

Rehoboam had 28 sons (2 Chronicles 11: 21); and Abijah was not the firstborn, but the oldest of the sons of Maachah whom the king loved more than all his other women. Abijah reigned in the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam; For Rehoboam (father of Abijah) reigned 17 years (1 Kings 14: 21). Each of them had a son called Abijah or Abijah. Abijah the son of Jeroboam died, as mentioned in the past chapter; whereas Abijah the son of Rehoboam lived after his father and became terror to Jeroboam.

Abijah, actually reigned less than three years; but as it was the custom of the Jews, they used to count a part of a year as a whole year, and a part of a day as a whole day. He died in the twentieth year of the reign of Jeroboam, and his son Asa reigned after him.

His mother's name was Maachah, a Semite name meaning (oppression); a granddaughter of Abishalom (his daughter's daughter); the third wife of Rehoboam; also called by the name of 'Michaiah' the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah, the husband of Tamar, daughter of Abishalom (2 Samuel 14: 27).

"Nevertheless for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by setting his son after

him, and by establishing Jerusalem" (4)

God supported Abijah to defeat Jeroboam; Yet, for his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, after his conquest he fell in pride; Hence God cut his reign short and set his son Asa a king after him.

"God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem" .It was the custom in the East, never to leave the house in darkness, unless its owner dies or if the house is destroyed. Hence, keeping a lamp lighted, meant the continuity of the life of man. According to the Holy Scripture, "The light of the wicked indeed goes out, and the flame of his fire does not shine. The light is dark in his tent, and the lamp beside him is put out" (Job 18: 5,6); and, "The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out" (Proverb 13: 9)

Although the sins of king Abijam have darkened the kingdom; yet, God gave a lamp in Jerusalem, a promise He gave to David, that his house will be lighted until Jesus Christ, his son according to the flesh, comes, who will give light to the whole world.

In the old covenant the golden lampstand had its special rites, concerning its seven lamps the kind of oil, and the flaxes used in them The continuity of lighting it, an essential thing in the life of those people; was a symbol of the need of human nature for the divine enlightenment, to take the darkness away from it, and to carry the fellowship with Christ, the true Light given to the world.

If Christ is the "Way" who leads our inner man to the bosom of the Father; He is, as well, the "Light" who reveals to us this royal path, so as not to deflect away from it.

- + In truth, the light was hidden and veiled in the law of Moses; but once Jesus came, and lifted the veil up, it shone, and the blessings whose shadow was presented in the letter, was instantly and truly proclaimed.

(The scholar Origen)

- + The rays of the Word is eternally ready to shine, as long as the windows of the soul are open through the simple faith.

(St. Hilary, bishop of Poitier)

- + Whoever rejects the light of the Word of God, should fear the punishment of the eternal darkness.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + Let us hope and endure, until the Lord's anger upon the night, which is the father of the wicked, passes by. *"We were once the children of the night; we, sometimes were darkness"* (Ephesians 2: 3; 5: 8); and its traces are apparent in our bodies, as we are dead by sins (Romans 8: 10). *"Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away"* (Songs 2: 17).

(St. Augustine)

- + It was also said that Christ gave light to the nations; as it is said by the prophet Isaiah: "I gave You as light to all the nations, for You to be my salvation to the end of the earth"; Hence David says: *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, and light for my path"*.

(Father Aphrahat)

- + No creation, rational or have the power of understanding, are enlightened by themselves, but through the fellowship with the eternal truth.

(St. Augustine)

"Because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that

He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (5)

God allowed for the lamp of David's house to stay lighted, not for the sake of Abijam, nor for that of his father Rehoboam, as they both committed evil; but for the sake of David their father, whose faithfulness to the Lord, the uprightness of his heart, and his true love, endured as blessings for the grandchildren of his grandchildren.

With contrition within himself, seeking the glory of God, David sang: *"Surely, I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty God of Jacob"* (Psalm 132: 3-5); And he enjoyed the divine promise: *"There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My anointed"* (Psalm 132: 17). That is the lamp that all the forces of darkness could never quench; namely, Jesus Christ the son of David, the

Light of the world. Having held fast to the divine commandment, a lamp to lighten the road for him (Psalm 119: 105); God set a non-quenchable lamp in David's house.

The Word of God commends David for the uprightness of his heart, and for not turning aside from the commandments of the Lord. Although David sinned, yet nothing was mentioned of his sins except that concerning the matter of Uriah the Hittite. This does not mean that it was not forgiven, but, by mentioning it, God intends to confirm its seriousness, lest someone else would fall into it. By his repentance, David indeed, did not lose his covenant with the Lord, nor lost the divine promises for himself and for his descendants after him.

Mentioning that particular sin, exhorts us to have strong awareness of it, for it remains attached to us, not concerning our salvation and eternal glory, but to make others beware not to fall. On another aspect, mentioning it, confirms the mercies of God, who sees David's heart as upright and blameless, despite his past fall into that horrible sin. Mentioning it opens the door of hope before every sinner.

"And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life" (6)

We are told by the second book of Chronicles (Chapter 13) how Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, and sought from Jeroboam and all Israel to resume their bond to the temple and to the priesthood of the sons of Aaron and the Levites, instead of opposing the Lord and fighting against the God of their fathers. In his talk. He seemed as someone jealous upon his people, and upon the glory of God; But, according to many, he was not truthfully faithful in his talk; but used it to stir up Israel against Jeroboam, and to establish his own kingdom. Saying: *"His heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David"* (3), indicates that he worshipped the idols together with the Lord; even though he brought into the house of the Lord precious utensils (15), probably to replace those that were taken away by Shishak the king of Egypt; And even though he seemed as a servant jealous upon the glory of the Lord in his war against Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 10-13-12).

God granted him conquest over Jeroboam, but unfortunately he walked in all the sins of his father (3); and to him apply the words of the prophet Isaiah, saying: *"Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness. In the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly; and will not behold the majesty of the Lord"* (Isaiah 26: 10)

"Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of Chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam" (7)

The hatred between the two kingdoms in the days of Jeroboam and Rehoboam, continued in the days of Abijam the son of Rehoboam, with an open, and serious war (1 Chronicles 13).

"So Abijam rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. Then Asa his son reigned in his place" (8)

2- ASA THE SON OF ABIJAM, THE REFORMER: (9 – 15)

*"In the twentieth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Asa became king over Judah; And he reigned 41 years in Jerusalem.
His grandmother's name was Maachah the granddaughter of Abishalom" (9, 10)*

Here he mentions Asa's grandmother, and not his mother, on account of that she was a strong woman who submitted her man Rehoboam and her son Abijam, especially concerning idol-worship. Removing her from being a queen was a proof of Asa's faith, and his jealousy for the Lord. Her name was originally Michaiah, then became Maachah when she became a queen; as it was the custom to change the name with the change of circumstances.

"And did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father David" (11)

Even though Asa was not a prophet, nor a psalmist; and had no continuous conquests in war; yet he followed the lead of his father David in his faithfulness to the Lord, his loyalty, and care for the glory of the Lord. He started his reign with positive reforms, *"what was right in the eyes of the Lord"*, not disregarding the negative aspect, namely, destroying evil, and wiping out all its traces.

"And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his father had made" (12)

Asa started strong, spiritually and politically. Beside the temple, he inherited from Solomon, as well, the crawling of idol-worship to the people; together with bitter evils and transgressions from his father Abijah, and his grandfather Rehoboam. He took away the houses of corruption, where homosexuality was practiced by (the perverted in the land); and was common as a part of idol-worship, mixed with adultery and homosexuality, both between males and males, and between females and females. Some of the heathen priests provoked the people, particularly of the lowly class, to practice evil to the account of the temples. By the perverted persons, he means those who practiced fornication with males; when some men, priests, and servants of the temple, clothed themselves with women attire to practice corruption. Yet those perverted persons were not utterly banished, for some of them remained until the days of his son Jehoshaphat (22: 46).

He followed that by destroying all the idols made by his father, to take away every curse from the kingdom. Diversion to idol-worship led to taking the kingdom away from the descendants of Jeroboam (1 kings 14: 10-14); Baasha (1 kings 16: 2-4) and Zimry (1 kings 16: 19); and bringing it over to another family; which did not happen with Abijah, nor with all the kings of Judah; on account of the unique faithfulness of David. In the period between the division of the kingdom and the captivation, the royal family did not change in Judah, whereas it changed nine times in Israel within two and a half centuries.

*“Also he removed Maachah, his grandmother, from being queen mother, because she made an
obscene image of Asherah. And Asa cut down her obscene image and
burned it by the brook
Kidron” (13)*

His faithfulness to the Lord was true and deep; he destroyed the idols made by his father. Together with the kingdom he inherited Maachah, his idol-worshipping grandmother; who had then a serious role. Having an upright heart, nothing stood against him; he removed her from her position as a queen for she set an obscene image; then drove her out of the royal palace to dwell in a private house, to keep her influence away from his own wife, from those who worked in the palace, and from statesmen everywhere. He did as the Levites (Deuteronomy 33: 9) who put the ministry of God above every family relationship. He cut down and burned his mother's obscene image by the brook of Kedron, following the lead of the prophet Moses (Exodus 32: 20), to take away every trace of the idol-worship; and as

Manasseh did when he moved the idol of Ashtoreth away from the house of the Lord, and burned it by the brook of Kedron; to keep the city from being defiled with the smoke or the unclean ashes of the idol.

In the Volgata it came that Asa removed his grandmother from her role as a priestess, practicing the sacred rites presented to 'Priapus' and his obscene image, she sanctified to him. In the Septuagint version it came that he removed her from her position as a ruler of a group she set by her obscene image. In the Syrian version he removed her from her greatness, as she used to worship the idols with awe. And in the Chaldean version, he removed her from her kingdom.

The word translated here as 'image', is derived from the Hebrew word, meaning (horror) or (fear); which applies to a very ugly and fearful image, like that of the Egyptian god 'Betah'.

"But the high places were not removed. Nevertheless Asa's heart was loyal to the Lord all his days" (14)

He cut down and destroyed all the idols, even those through which some worshipped God; Yet he did not remove the high places, namely, the altars set on the tops of hills to offer sacrifices to the living God; which the Jews used before building the temple; then the commandment clearly came to offer the sacrifices in only one place, namely, the temple (Deuteronomy 12: 11). Asa probably did not consider them as opposing the worship of the living God; not perceiving that they might be a snare that would draw many to idol-worship. The high places should not be understood as for idol-worship, but they were altars on which sacrifices were offered to the living God. Although it was banned by the law, yet it was not like idol-worship.

Saying that his heart was loyal to God, does not mean that he never sinned; but that he was faithful in his worship and his ministry to the Lord, and longing to live as is befitting. With his heart enflamed and renewable; the young king cut out the evil he received from his father and grandfather; deciding to do what is good in the sight of the Lord, like his father David.

Here we find a concise account of the reign of Asa; which is shown in more detail in 2 kings 16, 15, 14.

Despite all the reforms he has done, and the conquest he got in the name of the lord, yet he fell into the following weaknesses:

- (1) He resorted to Ben-Hadad king of Aram to save him from Baasha king of Israel (19, 18); disregarding the Lord who gave him awe and conquest.
- (2) Instead of listening to Hanani the seer who rebuked him for doing that, he became angry, and put him in prison (2 Chronicles 16: 7-10).
- (3) When God allowed for him to have a disease in his feet, to provoke him to repentance, he did not seek the healing from God, but sought it from the physicians (2 Chronicles 16: 12).

“He also brought into the house of the Lord the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which he himself had dedicated, silver , gold, and utensils” (15)

The things which his father and he himself had dedicated, are the things that Abijam gained in his wars, including his war against Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 13: 16-17); he dedicated them to the Lord as David did (2 Samuel 8: 11); he also dedicated the spoil he got in his war against Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chronicles 14: 9-15), which took place in the eleventh year of his reign (2 Chronicles 18; 15; 10). The heathen kings used to dedicate to their gods a part of the spoil they get in their wars, as did Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1: 7). Asa tried to make up for what Shishak king of Egypt has taken in the days of king Rehoboam.

If we look back at the kings of Judah, we find that about half of them were good kings, and the other half were wicked. Yet through God's care for his people, we find that He allowed for the good kings to reign a longer period, whereas for the wicked ones, it was for shorter ones. If it came in the commandment that he who honors his father and mother will live longer on earth; how much would it be for him who honors his heavenly Father, and his holy mother the Church. This does not mean that the wicked die young, and the good live longer; for one day for the Lord is like a thousand years; And for many elders, their life is counted as few minutes which passed fruitless; whereas for others, every breath of their life, they are considered as though have given work which no time could ever banish.

3- A TREATY BETWEEN ASA AND BEN-HADAD AGAINST ISRAEL: (16 – 22)

There had been a treaty between Abijam, Asa's father and Tabrimmon, Benhadad's father, king of Aram; which helped Abijam to enjoy a great conquest over Jeroboam, followed by several conquests (2 Chronicles 13: 17-20). But that treaty came to an end when Baasha, king of Israel, managed to make a treaty with Ben-Hadad son of Tabrimmon. ...\\

The way Jeroboam previously made a treaty with Shishak king of Egypt to support him against Judah, Baasha king of Israel, a man of war who did not know peace, made a treaty with Ben-Hadad against Judah; that provoked Asa to pay much to make Benhadad break that treaty.

Anyway, the division of Israel destroyed both kingdoms, scattered all their human and material resources; which was used by the kings of the surrounding nations to their account.

As Asa's military might weakened as a result of his war against the Ethiopians (2 Chronicles 14: 9), he resorted to make a treaty with Ben-Hadad king of Damascus (Aram) against the king of Israel, an act that was not justified by the Lord. And when Hanani the Seer came to rebuke Asa for resorting to the king of Aram, and disregarding the Lord; He got angry, and put him in prison (2 Chronicles 16: 7-10).

According to some, even though there was no actual danger from Israel's side against Judah; Asa's intention was to destroy Israel, even if the price was to rob the treasuries in the house of the Lord. Asa sinned by bribing Ben-Hadad king of Aram (Syria) to break his covenant with Israel; and not trusting in the Lord his God, who has done much for his, and for his fathers' sake, and who is capable of saving him from any tribulation, without trusting in human arm. He did wrong by giving the king of Aram all the silver and gold in the treasury of the Lord's house, and that of the king's house.

The division of Israel, therefore, provoked each of the two kingdoms to compete to gain the surrounding nations to their side -- Aram and Egypt in particular -- to support one against the other.

"Now, there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all his days" (16)

In 2 Chronicles 14: 1, reading that the land had rest for 10 years at the beginning of Asa's reign, we may assume that, even though there has been differences and controversies

between Asa and Baasha; yet there was no great war between them, other than the one mentioned here. He fortified the walls of the cities (2 Chronicles 14: 6, 7). And When he trusted in the name of the Lord his God, he could conquer Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chronicles 14: 9-15)

“And Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or gone in to Asa king of Judah” (17)

Although there was a continuous enmity between the two kings, yet no war worthy to mention happened, except when Baasha king of Israel started to build the village of Ramah on a high plateau within the portion of Benjamin (Joshua 18: 15; 1 Samuel 1: 19; Matthew 2: 18), about 6 miles north of Jerusalem, on the way to Bethel; which represented a threat against Judah (Isaiah 10: 29). ,, In its place nowadays is ‘Alram’.

Prophesying about the killing of the children of Bethlehem, Jeremiah said: *“A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children , because they are no more”* (Jeremiah 31: 15)

He built that village for the following reasons:

- a- To cut off commercial relationships between Judah and the northern kingdom.
- b- To stop anyone of his people, who had the intention to immigrate to Judah (2 Chronicles 15: 9); or to go to Jerusalem to worship the Lord in the temple.
- c- As a first step to attack the southern kingdom, or to attack Jerusalem.

“Then Asa took all the silver and gold that was left in the treasuries of the house of the Lord, and the treasuries in the king’s house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants; and king Asa sent them to king Ben-Hadad the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying: ‘Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. See, I have sent you a present of silver and gold. Come and break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me” (18, 19).

In 2 Chronicle 16: 7-10, it came that Hanani the Seer went to Asa and rebuked him for resorting to the king of Aram, disregarding the Lord his God; and prophesied wars that will bring his end up.

Ben-Hadad, meaning (the son of god the sun). According to some scholars three kings of Aram carried that name: The first Ben-Hadad, most probably, 'Hezion', or 'Rezon' whom God set as an adversary against Solomon (11: 23); the second Ben-Hadad was the one who fought against Ahab (22: 1-36); and the third Ben-Hadad was the one who caused trouble to Israel during the reign of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13: 3-13). ... When Ben-Hadad sent an army to the northern regions of Israel, and took over some towns in the Galilee on the border of Syria, Baasha had to retreat from Ramah.

Abijam and Asa brought the spoils of their enemies into the house of the Lord (15), those taken by Asa from Zareh the Ethiopian in particular (2 Kings 14: 13). Yet, whatever were the quantities of silver and gold that were in the palace and the temple, they are counted as nothing after Shishak the king of Egypt took all the treasuries in the days of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14: 26).

“So Ben-Hadad heeded king Asa and sent the captains of his army against the cities of Israel. He attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel-Beth Maachah, and all Chinneroth with all the land of Naphtali” (20).

Accepting the bribe from Asa, the king of Aram believed that by entering into a covenant with Judah, he would be able to take over some of the cities of Israel, close to him.

Ijon: west of Wady et-Teim, the best of the region of Mej Ayun, separated by hills from the Teim; was a fertile plain irrigated by wells, surrounded by hills, some of which are high, but mostly an agricultural land.

Abel-Beth Maacha: called Abel Meim (2 Chronicles 16: 4); and called Abellare by Josephus.

Chinnweoth: a northern region of Palestine, probably got its name from its extension, connected to the lake; North of Tiberias, known in the late eras as 'The plain of Gennesaret'; or as 'The town of Gennesaret' by Josephus.

"Now it happened when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah and remained in Tirzah" (21)

Because he could not fight two enemies at the same time, Baasha stopped building Ramah, and returned to his palace in Tirzah, a village close to Sheshem.(Nables).

*"Then king Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah, none was exempted. And they took away
the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building, and
with them king Asa built
Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah" (22)*

We should not mix Geba of Benjamin, mentioned here, with Gibeah of Saul. Geba, here, was one mile North East of Ramah (Joshua 18: 24); a high place on Wady Suweineth (1 Samuel 13: 3; 14: 5), 800 feet deep; By fortifying 'Geba', Asa believed that it would give him a better defense than Ramah.

Mizpah: Now called 'Beth Samuel', about a mile west of Ramah (Joshua 18: 26), the highest hill close to Jerusalem; was the city where the children of Israel gathered together to choose their first king (1 Samuel 10: 17-27); and where Asa made a pit (Jeremiah 41: 5-9).

4- ILLNESS AND DEATH OF ASA: (23-24)

*"The rest of all the acts of Asa, all his might, all that he did, and the cities
which he built, are they not
written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah. But in the time of
his old age he was
diseased in his feet. So Asa rested with his fathers, and was buried with his
fathers in the city of
David his father" (23)*

In 2 Chronicles 14-16, it was mentioned that he built fortified cities, and his army was 300,000 from Judah, and 280,000 from Benjamin. He conquered Zerah the Ethiopian, whose army was 1,000,000; God talked to him through a prophet, and encouraged him to uproot the abominations from all the land of Judah and Benjamin.

When he was 50 years old, and was diseased in his feet, he did not seek God who chastened him with the illness, but physicians, most probably magicians.

"Then Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place" (24)

Asa rested with his fathers; and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place. The good king was inherited by a godly son (873-848); who, for three years shared the throne with him.

5- NADAB THE SON OF JEROBOAM THE EVIL KING: (25-28)

"Now Nadab the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah; and he reigned over Israel two years" (25)

He reigned two incomplete years, for he reigned in the second year of Asa; then was replaced by Baasha in the third year.

"And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin by which he made Israel sin" (26)

To establish his kingdom, Nadab walked in the way of his father Jeroboam, persisted on worshipping the two golden calves, and on keeping the people from going to Jerusalem to worship in the temple of the Lord. Worshipping the two calves, those two kings, together with their men, were deceiving themselves by assuming that they were worshipping the Lord through them.. Hence God allowed for Nadab to be killed soon by Baasha, in the second year of his reign, while he laid Gibbethon under siege, the city that was taken over by the Palestinians, while trying to take it back. While he was in the midst of his army, Baasha and his men conspired against him and killed him. The army did not stand by their king, but set the killer to replace him.

"Then Baasha the son of Abijah of the house of Issachar conspired against him at Gibbethon which belonged to the Philistines, while Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon" (27)

No other king nor judge have ever come from the tribe of Issachar, except the judge 'Tola' (Judges 10: 1-2). Issachar dwelt in 'Marg ben Amer' and has been, as Jacob prophesied, "*a strong donkey lying down the sheepfolds; he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to the burden, and became a slave at forced labor*" (Genesis 49: 14, 15).; And the Lord referred to his lowly origin by saying to Baasha: "*I lifted you out of the dust*" (16: 1); which indicates that the Lord called him to throne as He did to Jeroboam.

Gibbethon: a Hebrew name meaning (mountain) or (a high place), in the land of Dan, on the border of the land of the Philistines, which was given to the families of the children of Kohath, the Levites (Joshua 21: 20), then taken over by the Philistines. Nadab tried to take it back; and Israel continued to do, until the time of 'Omri'; namely, after 26 years (16: 25). It is probably what is known today as 'Tel Milat', 5/8 mile south of Themna, and directly east of Ekron.

"Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah and reigned in his place" (28)

6- BAASHA DESTROYS ALL THE HOUSE OF JEROBOAM: (29-34)

"And it was so, when he became king, that he killed all the house of Jeroboam. He did not leave to Jeroboam anyone that breathed until he destroyed him, according to the words of the Lord which He had spoken by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite" (29)

The first task done by the new king was to destroy the house of Jeroboam. Although that was a ferocious act, yet it was allowed by the Lord as a lesson to the people to perceive the fruit of deflection from God, the source of life. By it, the prophecy of Ahijah the prophet was realized, and the Word of the Lord did not fall. But unfortunately, he, whom the Lord used as His rod to chastise the house of Jeroboam, walked in his same way, and did not heed the lesson in it.

"Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he had sinned, and by which he had made Israel sin, because

of his provocation with which he had provoked the Lord of Israel to anger” (30)

“Now the rest of the acts of Nadab and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles

of the kings of Israel?” (31)

“And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days” (32)

*“In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha the son of Ahijah became king over all Israel in Tirzah,
and reigned twenty-four years” (33). “He did evil in the sight of the Lord,
and walked in the way of
Jeroboam, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin” 34)*

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1

KINGS 15

**YOU ARE MY RIGHTEOUSNESS, O LORD; YOU ARE MY GOODNESS
I SHALL NEVER TRUST IN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF MY FATHERS**

- + Behold, the history of the kingdom of Judah shakes my whole being;
Many good kings begat wicked ones; and many wicked kings begat good ones;
Every king is responsible for himself before You;
Abijam the son of Rehoboam was not perfect;
And Asa the son of Abijam did what is right in the sight of the Lord as David his grandfather did;
He removed his grandmother Maachah from the kingdom, and banished her obscene image;
He brought his treasures to the house of the Lord;
Yet his heart was not as perfect as that of his grandfather
He sinned by trusting in Ben-Hadad the Aramite, to fight against his brother king of Israel;
And in his old age he did not seek the Lord to heal him'
Grant me, O Lord, a perfect heart like that of my father David;

Grant me, O Lord, not to trust in the righteousness of my fathers
You are my righteousness; You are my goodness.

- + The kingdom of Israel did not have one king sanctified to You;
The wicked Jeroboam begat Nadab who walked in his father's way;
Baasha killed him, then walked in his wicked way;
Who will reform my way, but You?
Who will set in me a sanctified kingdom (will) but You?

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CHAPTER 16

REVOLUTIONS IN THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

This chapter tells us about the successive revolutions in the kingdom of Israel within a short period of time. With many assassinations committed, one evil royal family replaced another as evil. After Baasha destroyed the house of Jeroboam, Zimri came to destroy the house of Baasha; then Omri attempted to kill Zimri.

1- Jehu's prophecy against the house of Baasha	1 - 8
2- Zimri assassinates Elah	9 - 14
3- Zimri reigns for a week	15
4- Zimri commits suicide, burning his house down upon himself	16 - 20
5- Omri builds Samaria	21 - 24
6- Ahab the worshipper of Baal	28 – 34

1- JEHU'S PROPHECY AGAINST THE HOUSE OF BAASHA: (1-8)

Having been a shrewd and active politician, Baasha made his house a royal family; Yet destroyed it by being an idol-worshipper. God warned him through the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani, with the hope that he may return from his evil and live; as He did when He sent the prophet Hanani to Asa king of Judah.

"Then the word of God came to Jehu the son of Hanani, against Baasha, saying: 'Inasmuch as I lifted you out of the dust, and made you ruler over My people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and you have made my people Israel sin, to provoke Me to anger with their sins; Surely I will take away the posterity of Baasha and the posterity of his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nabat. The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Baasha and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the fields'" (1-4)

Hanani rebuked Asa the king for trusting in Aram in his war against Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 16: 7). Now came Jehu, Hanani's young son as a messenger from God to deliver to king Baasha a strong and serious message, proclaiming the destruction of the house of Baasha in an extremely disgraceful way. Then, 40 years later God sent him to rebuke king Jehoshaphat for joining forces with king Ahab (2 Chronicles 19: 2, 3). It so seems that Jehu was an inhabitant of Jerusalem.

Jehu's message to Baasha conformed to that of the prophet Ahija to king Jeroboam, sent to him through his wife, when she came to inquire from the prophet about the illness of her son Abijah (12: 11).

Before proclaiming His chastisement to the wicked king, God reminded him of his divine work and goodness to him; and of how He lifted him out of the dust up to the throne. Then He revealed to him the extent of the crime he committed; as though he pays His goodness back with great evil.

God gave the wicked king the reasons behind the verdict He issued against him; not to justify His harsh chastisement; but to give him a chance to reconsider his evil actions, and return to God with repentance.

God's chastisement might appear too severe; yet, in reference to the bitter denials of Baasha of the exalted goodness of God, not only by committing evil, but by making the people sin, we can perceive the secret behind the severity of the verdict. Yes, indeed, the sin of the leader or the shepherd has to be severe and bitter, on account of that he provokes his brethren together with him to evil.

Baasha was a tool to chasten the house of the evil Jeroboam; Yet, having walked in the same way of Jeroboam, and did not heed the lesson, God sent someone to chasten him as well.

God allowed to postpone the chastisement of Baasha till after his death, by taking the throne away from his descendants; and allowed it for their corpses to be eaten by the dogs and the birds of prey.... Why? ... So that the wicked would think, not only about what will dwell upon them of chastisement while still alive, but about the eternal punishment that will dwell upon them after their death; ,, To fear Him who after killing the body, has the authority to cast in the fire of hell.

The heart may probably become so hard, not to care for any chastisement that would dwell upon his person; But, it would be most difficult for him to realize how his evil deeds would cause bitterness to his children and grandchildren. Hence God often threatens the wicked to bring bitter fruition upon their descendants. But this does not mean that the children and the grandchildren are punished for sins they have not committed; but chastisement would dwell upon the descendants who consummate the evil cup of their fathers.

“Now, the rest of the acts of Baasha, what he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the

Chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Baasha rested with his fathers and was buried in Tirzah. Then Elah

his son reigned in his place” (5-6).

And also the word of the Lord came to the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha and his house,

because of all the evil that he did in the sight of the Lord in provoking Him to anger with the work of his

hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and because he killed them” (7)

We do not know much about the prophet Jehu, except that he suddenly appeared to proclaim the chastisement of the Lord against Baasha; then, 40 years later, appeared to tell us about the life of king Jehoshaphat. We know nothing of the prophetic work or other aspects of Yehu's life, other than those two situations that might have taken from him just few minutes, yet could be as important as his whole life. Man's life is not counted by the number of years he lives on earth, but by the work he does by the Spirit of the Lord. According to the scholar Origen, on the great day of the Lord, we shall be surprised to see many children who appear like elders; whereas many elders appear as little children. What St. John the Baptist did while a babe in his mother's womb in few minutes may be evaluated as many years; and the few months he ministered to prepare the way of the Lord, are beyond evaluation. Whereas in his days many of the Jewish leaders spent tens of years studying the Holy Book; teaching, and leading the people in worship; yet those years are counted as nothing.

“In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah the son of Baasha became king over Israel, and

reigned two years in Tirzah” (8)

2- ZIMRI ASSASINATES ELAH: (9-14)

*“Now his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, conspired against him as he was in Tirzeh,
drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, steward of his house in Tirzah” (9)*

While Nadab was assassinated while he, together with his army laid a siege around Gibbethon (1 Kings 15: 27); and was honorable even in his death; Elah, on the other hand, being a man of pleasure, was assassinated in his palace while drunk .

The Holy Book presents to us many examples that reveal the perdition brought over man by drinking wine: Elah was assassinated while drunk; Abishalom killed his brother Amnon while the latter was drunk (2 Samuel 13: 28); Lot fell into a disgraceful sin with his two daughters while drunk; and the Babylonian empire fell into extinction through the drinking of Belshazzar (Daniel 5).

When death suddenly comes to someone, watchful and faithful in his work and life with the Lord, it would be a joyful gift, and merely a cross-over to the new life; Whereas he, whom death surprises while drinking and having pleasure, death would be like a thief robbing him of his eternal life (Luke 2: 34).

Concerning ‘Arza’, a steward of the house, was a very prominent position, that Solomon gave only to princes. In Persia, the steward of the house used to act as a deputy of the king when absent.

*“Zimri went in, struck him, and killed him in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned
in his place. Then it came to pass when he began to reign, as soon as he was seated on his throne,
that he killed all the household of Baasha; he did not leave him one male,
neither of his kinsmen nor
of his friends” (10, 11)*

God sent Jehu the Seer to Baasha, who did not heed the words of the Lord on his mouth. Miserable is he, who does not respond to the word of the Lord sent to him one way or

another. To everyone on earth, God sends an inner Jehu, namely, the law of nature, or an outer Jehu, through the events and others, in the hope that he would come to enjoy the fellowship with God, and the response to His will, instead of going astray from Him.

"He did not leave him one male, neither of his kinsmen, nor of his friends" (11); The expression "kinsmen" came here to mean anyone who may have the right to avenge his death; (According to a Jewish saying: up to the fifth neighbor of someone would be killed, to wipe out all his memories from the face of the earth). ... Although Zimri thought that he so did, and there is no one left to avenge the death of his master 'Elah', Yet it was the divine justice that chased him; to hear Jehu, after a long time, utter the common proverb, saying: *"Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?"* (2 Kings 9: 31)

Many are those who, disregarding the divine justice, may assume that, by their authority, wealth, or high position in the society, can do whatever they like, caring for no one; Yet, eventually to hear the divine voice, saying: *"As you have done, it shall be done to you"* (Obadiah 15).

And some may assume that time will cover up any sin or fault; But man will certainly drink from the same cup he filled for his brethren, as long as he did not repent for what he has done.

Everyday we feel the amazing touch of the hand of God; when the words of Solomon the Sage would be realized in our life, saying: *"Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days"* (Ecclesiastes 11: 1).

*"Thus Zimri destroyed all the household of Baasha, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke
against Baasha by Jehu the prophet" (12)*

The prophet Ahijah prophesied about the destruction of the house of Jeroboam; And God allowed for Baasha to be the rod of chastisement against him; Yet, because he did that with a vicious spirit, he came to be responsible for his horrible actions. Because God did not command him to destroy the house of Jeroboam, and he did not do it out of a reforming motive, but with the spirit of crime; it came to be a sin for which he would be punished.

"For all the sins of Baasha and the sins of Elah his son, by which they had made Israel sin, in provoking

the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols.

Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" (13, 14)

3- ZIMRI REIGNS FOR A WEEK: (5)

"In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri had reigned in Tirzah seven days. And the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines"
(15)

By the assassination of Elah, the third royal family of Israel came to reign, just for a week, to be replaced by the fourth family on the throne.

The throne of Israel came to be a serious stage for the wicked, who assumed to rise high up, and no harm could reach them; and who thought that, by their own might and ability, could govern and reign; taking no lessons of what happened to the wicked kings who previously came before them. Yet while rising high up, they would be cast down to the ground, to be destroyed together with their household. God granted them the throne as a gift from him; yet, by their evil, they turned the divine gift into a cause for their own destruction. Many of us may think that the wicked are strong, and would last longer; but, according to St. Ambrose, they are more like a shadow which will soon disappear; Time will quickly pass, their strength will be destroyed, and their authority will go away; Or, according to the prophet David, they are like a dream from which the believers will awake to find the wicked no more.

- + The wicked, therefore, while rising high up, they are cast down; What they get, therefore, is not a gift, but is rather a calamity, when their enjoyment of it does not endure for a long time. For what would weigh as much as the divine complaint we find in the book of the prophet Micah; saying: *"O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. For I brought you up from the land of Egypt; I redeemed you from the house of bondage"* (Micah6: 3, 4).

See how the wicked are cast down while rising up; How their punishment piles up; Having got so much divine heavenly gifts, they ought not to desert the Giver of hope, and of the comfort of life, but rather to obey Him. But, as great is God's justice, so is

his revenge. For the wicked holds fast to his wickedness; concerning him it is written: *"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).

How fast he would be destroyed, is beyond imagination; He is like a shadow which is now here, then in no time it will disappear. If there is disturbance here, lift your spirits up to the things to come; for then you will realize that the wicked whom you assumed to be here forever, will be no more. For, according to the words of the apostle Paul: *"The Lord knows those who are His"* (2 Timothy 2: 19); But He would not recognize who are not there; those who did not recognize Him whose name is *"I am who I am"* (Exodus 3: 14).

- + Concerning the later, David also says: *"Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment. They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image"* (Psalm 73: 19, 20). This implies that the wicked will cease to exist, and will vanish like a dream, once one awakes from his sleep. They are in darkness, and walk in darkness (Psalm 82: 5); And so being, they are denied the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 3: 20; 4: 2), and the heaven of virtue; for they are always asleep, and do not watch; about them it is said: *"They have sunk in their sleep; and nothing is found in their hands"* (Psalm 76: 5). For indeed, once their souls separate from their bodies, and are free from the sleep of the body, they will find nothing, and will have nothing. They will lose what they assumed to possess; For the foolish, even if he is weighed with wealth, he will leave it to strangers; and the glory of his house will not go down with him to the pit (Psalm 49: 17).

(St. Ambrose)

4- ZIMRI COMMITS SUICIDE; BURNING HIS HOUSE DOWN UPON HIMSELF: (16 - 20)

"Now the people who were encamped heard it, said, 'Zimri has conspired and also has killed the king'.

So all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp (16).

The Omri and all Israel with him went up from Gibbethon, and they besieged Tirzah (17).

*And it happened when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the citadel of the king's house,
and burned the king's house upon himself with fire and died" (18)*

Having killed Elah, men of the army, probably provoked by Omri their commander, intending to take revenge against him, went up from Gibbethon, and besieged the capital Tirzah. That led Zimri to kill himself with fire and died. It could also be that the Philistines provoked the Israeli army to act that way, to create a dissension in Israel.

As Tirzah was a beautiful city, yet not fortified; And as the army, he hoped to guard him against enemies has become an enemy against him, Zimri had no other way than to burn the royal palace upon himself; to deny his enemies from using it; and on another aspect, for fear that he would be dishonorably treated if taken alive;

That is how sin would do to us when we dwell in an atmosphere of pleasure, and do not care for the divine protection; For then our talents that are supposed to be for our service, would turn to become an enemy who destroy our depths; we would lose our inner life, which would turn into a deadly flame of fire.

The army and the people did not think of taking revenge against Baasha when he assassinated the whole house of Jeroboam, and killed Nadab the king; probably on account of that they were all fed up with Jeroboam and his household, because of their violence and abuse of their positions.

According to Solomon the Sage, *"Because of the transgression of a land, many are its princes"* (Proverb 29: 2). Zimri, Omri, and Tibni, who fought one another for the sake of getting the throne; Zimri killed himself in his palace, Tibni died in a vague way, and Omri reigned and walked in the evil way of Jeroboam.

Zimri reigned for just seven days, then burned the house upon himself, as a fruit of his persistence on walking in the way of Jeroboam, and of provoking the people to do evil. ... Here the fruit of evil came very fast. For, although God is longsuffering, even on the wicked, Yet He sometimes allows for some of them to drink fast from the cup they filled, as an example for others who may misunderstand His longsuffering; as according to the apostle

Paul, *“Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous rightness of God”* (Romans 2: 4)

“... because of the sins which he had sinned in doing evil in the sight of the Lord, in walking in the way of

Jeroboam, and in his sin which he had committed to make Israel sin” (19).

Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the treason he committed, are they not written in the book of the

Chronicles of the kings of Israel? (20)

Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Gimath

to make him king, and half followed Omri” (21)

The people were divided into two parts: one half supported Omer who rebelled against Zimri; and the other half supported Tibni; The later group were probably those who supported Zimri, and had bitter feeling against Omri who provoked the army to move against Zimri. That division probably lasted for four years, and caused a plenty of blood shed on both sides. According to Josephus, Tibni was probably killed by Omri or one of his followers, to have the way completely open before himself.

Some may wonder, in the midst of such horrible atmosphere of continuous assassinations and divisions, Why did Israel not think of returning to the house of David, and of uniting with Judah?! ... Kings and leaders of Israel kept enflaming the spirit of dissension among the new generations, claiming that the kings of Judah -- giving Rehoboam as an example -- reigned with a spirit of arrogance. That is beside the fact that only a few number of those pure and godly, who worshipped the true God, in the northern kingdom, have already crawled to Judah; But the rest of the people were not ready to forsake their enjoyable abominations, adultery, and transgressions, even if the fruit of that would be the destruction of the kingdom, the shedding of blood, and the division within the army and the people.

5- OMRI BUILDS SAMARIA: (24 – 26)

“But the people who followed Omri prevailed over the people who followed Tibni the son of Gimath; So

Tibni died and Omri reigned (22).

In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel, and reigned twelve years.

Six years he reigned in Tirzah (23).

And he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; then he built on the hill, and

called the name of the city which he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill" (22-24)

According to some the army has been supportive to Omri, their commander; while the people were supportive of Tibni; And the army prevailed.

Omri moved the capital from where Zimri burned the house upon himself, and purchased the hill of Samaria to build his new capital of Israel; he purchased it from Shemer for a cheap price, for a promise that he would call it Samaria (Shemeren in Hebrew); although, according to others, two talents of silver (about 700 Sterling pounds), could have been a big enough price for such a hill.

It was impossible for the dissident kingdom of Israel, which gave her back to God, to be well-established. While in the days of Jeroboam, the capital was Shechem; then Tirzah; then Samaria; Whereas the capital of the kingdom of Judah has always been Jerusalem, the city of God. So it is with the soul that gives her back to God; it will never be well-established; Whereas the soul that gets bound to Him, will always find her comfort in the higher Jerusalem, whose Maker is the Lord.

Omri, who got fame for building Samatia, for his courage, and his conquests; died on his bed, and was buried with his fathers. Yet, with his wickedness, he left behind him an inheritance of evil, that destroyed all his household and descendants. Like Jeroboam, and Baasha, so was Omri; even though all were evil, they died and were buried, but their households did not endure, but were destroyed by the evil they committed, which was taken up after them by their descendants.

On an antique tablet, unearthed in the ruins of Nineveh, an inscription was discovered, in which the city of Samaria was called, 'Beth Khumri', namely (the house of Omri).

In the days of Tiglath Pileser it was called 'Sammerim'; and after being rebuilt, Herod called it 'Sebustiyeh', then called later 'Sebaste'.

Politically, Samaria could be better than Shechem, and probably better than Tirzeh; For, on a military aspect, it was a fortified city. And on an economic aspect, it was surrounded by many springs of water, contrary to Shechem and Tirzeh, that were dry and deserted.

"Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did worse than all who were before him" (25)

That reminds us of what used to happen in the Roman Empire; Whenever the army heard that the king was assassinated, they instantly presented the purple royal robe to their general commander.

Omri received the throne after a long struggle against Tibni; Yet, after settling down in the new capital which he himself built, he started to act against the truth, and to do evil, more than all who were before him. He, and his son Ahab, became two examples of evil, about whom the words of the Lord said: *"For the statutes of Omri are kept; All the works of Ahab's house are done; And you walk in their counsels; that I may make you a desolation, and your inhabitants a hissing; Therefore you shall bear the reproach of My people"* (Micah 6: 16).

Jeroboam provoked the people to idol-worship, seducing them by setting two centers of worship and the two golden calves; Whereas Omri used violence to commit them to it.

"For he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nabat, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God to anger with their idols" (26)

In the Arabic language version it came as: *:"... provoking the Lord God with their 'vanities'"*. The Hebrews call the idols (vanities), (void), or (nothing); and whoever gets bound to them would become 'vanity', contrary to whoever gets bound to the True God, who would, himself, become 'truth'.

Whoever worships God in truth, through union with Him *"will be a partaker of the divine nature"* (2 Peter 1: 3, 4) While whoever worships 'vanity' will partake of its vain nature through union with it. For worshipping is not just a routine practiced by the body, but it is in

truth a union of man, with his whole being, with the one he worships; to become one with him, to partake of His nature, his glories (or his reproach in case of idols), his eternity, (or his eternal perdition (in the case of worshipping the devil).

We do not marvel to see, in our modern age, how the devil-worship publicly invaded the West, and crawled to the East; and how his worshippers came to bear many of his features, particularly his blasphemy of the true God, opposition of the divine word, use of violence, abnormal practices, and even breaking the natural law. We can truly say that they came to be ambassadors of the devil, carrying his features, to realize his goal of distribution of vain lies, corruption, spirit of vanity, and blood shed.

“Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and the might that he showed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (27)

6- AHAB THE WORSHIPPER OF BAAL: (28 – 34)

“So Omri rested with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria. Then Ahab his son reigned in his place” (28)

Omri reigned about 12 years: the first four years struggling against Tibni, and about eight years after the death of the later. He spent the first six years in Tirzeh, until he built the new capital (Samaria), to which he moved and lived the remaining six years of his reign.

In the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Asa king of Judah, Omri was set a king by the army.

In thirty-first year of Asa (namely after four years) of Asa's reign, he reigned alone after the death of Tibni.

In the year 32/33 of Asa's reign, Samaria became the capital (after two years of Omri's reign).

“In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of omri reigned over Israel; in Samaria, twenty-two years” (29)

“Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him” (30)

Although his father Omri did more evil than all who were before him, Yet Ahab his son surpassed him, when he issued a decree committing the people to worship the idols, something that never happened before. The kings before Ahab provoked the people to idol-worship with every possible mean, but without issuing laws to commit them. But by marrying Isabel, not only by committed the people to worship the idols, but he killed the priests of the true God, destroyed His altars, and declared a public war against whatever has something to do with the Lord (1 kings 18: 4). Worshipping the two golden calves has become, no more a symbolic worship of the living God, but came to be a worship directly meant to the idols,

*“And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nabat, that he took
as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal , king of the sidonians, and he went and served Baal and worshipped him” (31)*

‘Ethbaal’ is related to ‘Ithobalus of Menandrt’ who prevailed over Tyre, and probably over all Phoenicia, 50 years after the death of ‘Hiram’. The word ‘Baal’ means (Baal is with him). ‘Ethbaal’ was a priest in the great temple of Ashtoreth in Tyre. And when he became 36 years old, he killed ‘Pheles’ or ‘Philetes’, king of Tyre, and took his throne by force. He reigned for 32 years, and established a royal dynasty that reigned for 62 years.

His daughter Jesebel dedicated all her energy to establish the Baal-worship in Israel, and to wipe out every trace of the worship of the living God; that her name became a symbol of every corruption (Revelation 22: 24).

This marriage of Ahab to the daughter of the king of Tyre, undoubtedly carried a political feature, as a kind of peace treaty between Israel and Sidon; the way king Solomon did, who married many wives to establish good relationship with the surrounding nations. As the daughter of the priest of Baal, she might have assumed that it was her mission to dictate Baal-worship, to kill the priests of the true God, and to destroy His altars everywhere. But there was no excuse for Ahab to give a free hand to his wife to do whatever she likes in the people's life; to build a temple for Baal, and to establish the worship of ;’Ashtoreth’, the Sidonian goddess ‘Venus’.

“Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria” (32)

He set up an altar for Baal in the capital, to make 'Samaria' one of the main centers of Baal worship, where sacrifices were continuously offered, and incense was perpetually burnt, and where the priests ministered barefoot, dancing around, and kissing the idol (1 kings 19: 18), as a main rite of the worship.

"And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel

before him In his days, Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn; and with his youngest

son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the Lord, which He had spoken through Joshua the son of Nun"

(33-34)

Five centuries before, Joshua prophesied, saying, *"Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds Jericho, he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates"* (Joshua 6: 26)

What does it mean, that Hiel of Bethel *"laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates"*?

- (1) By a divine verdict, curse dwells upon his family, through the death of the firstborn, the hope of the family, when the foundations are laid; followed by the death of all his siblings one after the other, until the youngest dies when the gates are set up
- (2) This text might also refer to the fact that building that city took a very long time, its foundation laid with the birth of the firstborn, until its gates were set up with the birth of the youngest son. In other words God allowed for many things to happen to slow down the process of its building, to give Hiel the chance to quit and repent; but having persisted, the curse prophesied by Joshua dwelt upon him.
- (3) That Hiel of Bethel might have dedicated building the city by offering his firstborn as a sacrifice to the idols, to let them support his endeavor; and his youngest son when he set up its gates; a view adopted by the Chaldeans.

Up to this very day, this city is cursed; not wiped out of existence, but remained as a humble village, with no more than 30 little houses; and with no significant remains that may reveal its past glory.

That was a sample of evil that prevailed upon the people, their persistence on rebellion and their lack of care, regardless of the curse declared by Joshua the son of Nun.

AN INSPIRATION OF 1 KINGS 16

WHO WILL TAKE MY CORRUPTION AWAY, BUT YOU?

- + The revolts of Israel will ever remain before my eyes;
How they were divided, and how they have forsaken Jerusalem, Your holy city;
How they have forsaken Your holy temple, and how they have set up for themselves two golden calves;
How they defiled their life by idol-worship;
How Jahu assassinated the household of Baasha;
How Zimri murdered Elah;
How Zimdi killed himself, to be replaced by Omri;
How Omri was replaced by Ahab his son, the worst of the kings of Israel.

Draw me to You, to keep me from walking with the spirit of dissension;
Keep me in Your holy city, the blameless church of Christ;
Sanctify my worship, to keep Your statutes by the spirit and truth;
To keep Your commandment with faithfulness;
- + Grant me not to deflect together with Israel;
Keep me from worshipping vanity, so as not to become vanity; myself
Let me worship You. O the eternal Truth;
Let me unite with You; to have fellowship with Your divine nature;
And to become Your partner in the eternal glory;
- + Who will take away my corruption, but You?

Who will sanctify me, but You”?

Who will keep me safe, but the bosom of Your Father?

AN ANNEX OF I KINGS !6

THE MOST PROMINENT CAPITALS OF THE OLD WORLD IN THE HOLY BOOK

God chose Jerusalem, which means (Light of peace) or (Vision of peace), to represent the encounter of God with His people, and His dwelling among them, to grant them His heavenly peace. Being called ‘the city of the Great King’, it became the capital of the kingdom of Israel before the dissension. As to the northern kingdom of the divided Israel, it could not settle down on one capital, for its first king Jeroboam chose the city of Cheshem, followed by Tirzeh, then Samaria.

- (1) **Ur of the Chaldeans:** The capital of the ancient Somer on the bank of the Euphrates. It was occupied by the Somerites, the Elamites, the Babylonians, and the Chaldeans . Its history goes back more than 1000 years before the time of Abraham, the father of fathers, and was his home town before God called him to go to Haran, then to Canaan (Genesis 11: 28; 15: 7; Nehemiah 9: 7). Its inhabitants worshipped the moon. Its remains nowadays are the ruins of ‘Mogher’ midway between Bagdad and the Persian Gulf.
- (2) **Shushan or Susa:** Capital of the ancient Elam; East of Mesopotamia; was stronger than Babylon, then submitted to Persia, and became its capital. In it, the events mentioned in the book of Esther took place (Esther 1: 2-5).
- (3) **Achmetha:** Capital of the empire of Media (Ezra 6: 2); became the summer resort of the kings of Persia. The Medians were the descendants of ‘Madai’ the son of ‘Japheth’ (Genesis 10: 2), connected to the Persians in nationality, language, and history. In the days of Cyrus, the two kingdoms of Media and Persia united together in the year 588 B.C., to be called as ‘Media and Persia’ (Daniel 5: 28; Esther 1: 18).

- (4) **Nineveh:** Capital of the Assyrian empire, an ancient fortified city, where the prophet Jonah preached, and its people repented (the Book of Jonah).
- (5) **Babylon:** Capital of the Babylonian empire in the land of the Chaldeans (Jeremiah 41: 3); where the people of Judah were captivated three times.
- (6) **Jerusalem:** Capital of Israel in the time of the prophet David (2 Samuel 7: 5-6). In it, Solomon built the temple of the Lord; It bears a symbol of the heavenly Higher Jerusalem (Revelation 21).
- (7) **Samaria:** Built by Omri, the sixth king of the northern kingdom in the year 880 B.C. made it the capital of Israel, up till the Assyrian captivity.
- (8) **Damascus:** Capital of Syria (Aram); an important commercial center, one of the most ancient cities of the world (Genesis 14: 15).
- (9) **Hebron:** West of Jerusalem; was the capital of king David when he reigned on Judah (2 Samuel 2: 1-4); It was where Abraham settled down after returning from Egypt (Genesis 13: 18).
- (10) **Nu:** Known also as 'Thebes', in Lower Egypt; was the capital of Egypt, and a center of idol-worship in the Egyptian Valley
- (11) **Shechem:** The first capital of the northern kingdom after the dissension, in the days of Jeroboam.
- (12) **Tirzeh:** A very beautiful city (Songs 6: 4); became the capital of the northern kingdom for as long as 50 years (1 Kings 14: 17; 15: 21; 16: 16); until Omri built Samaria;

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CHAPTER 17

SUSTENANCE OF ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

The divided kingdom of Israel started on the hand of Jeroboam who set up two centers of worship in Dan and Bethel; and made two golden calves for the people to worship God through them. He did his best to keep the people from going up to Jerusalem to worship God in His temple. He was followed by a continuous series of evil kings; with not a single good one among them. Evil reached its climax when Ahab reined and got married to Jezebel daughter of the king of Tyre, and priest of Baal, who put in her heart to wipe out by brute force, every trace of the worship of the living God, and to establish that of Baal..

In the midst of that pitch dark atmosphere, God sent 'Elijah the Tishbite', an amazing prophet, to testify to Him, and to work for the sake of the salvation of his brethren. While the devil set up Ahab and Jezebel to provoke the spirit of corruption, God, on the other hand, set up Elijah the Tishbite to testify to Him, and to work to the account of His kingdom. As there was never, among the kings of Israel, one as aggressive in doing evil as Ahab; There was never, among the prophets, one as daring and fiery as Elijah. His story with God started in this chapter, supported by exalted miracles, shining with the spirit of splendor and power; Was the only prophet to have the honor of joining Enoch to be taken alive up to heaven; And, together with the prophet Moses, to have the great honor to encounter the Lord Christ in His transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

While the rest of the prophets prophesied and had their prophesies recorded in writing, Elijah, on the other hand, left no written prophesies, but worked; and his works remained a living testimony to the divine Truth.

1- Elijah's prophecy concerning the draught

1

2- Elijah sustained by the ravens

2 - 7

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 3- Elijah sustained by the widow of Zarepath | 8 - 16 |
| 4- Elijah raises the son of the widow from the dead | 17 – 24 |

1- ELIJAH'S PROPHECY CONCERNING THE DRAUGHT: (1)

Why did the prophet Elijah start his prophetic work by prophesying a draught to dwell upon Israel?

Having reached the lowest level of corruption, the king and his people were in need, not of an oral warning, but of something to shake their life and existence, to exhort them to reconsider their position, and to perceive the extent of the inner draught that had dwelt upon them, through their deprivation of the water of the divine grace. As to the sustenance of Elijah by the ravens that are used to snatching, particularly in a time of draught, bore a confirmation that God would make nature work to the account of His believers, even if it entails breaking its laws. His sustenance by the widow of Zarepath, reveals God's practical care for his believers of any race. And finally, raising the widow's son from the dead, opens the door of hope before the people, not to despair because of the death that dwelt upon their souls through sin and corruption; And proclaims God's longing to set every soul up to enjoy life.

Contrary to all prophets, there is no mention of the prophet's father, mother, tribe, or family; As though the Holy Book intends to confirm that Elijah, a gift from God to the people for the sake of their repentance, bears a heavenly power from the Lord, depending on no human reference. Because the Jews thought of him as an angel who came down from heaven, the apostle James confirms that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours (James 5: 17).

+ God grants those who fulfill His will, what would be granted only to His friends.

(Clement the Roman)

*“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ahab,
‘As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom
I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my
word” (1)*

“Elijah”, a Hebrew word meaning (My God is Jehovah); As though, by his name, he testifies that he would worship no one but God, who sent him to bring the souls back to Him, and works through him.

“The Tishbite” means (the stranger). Saying, “*The Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead*”, means, therefore, (a stranger of the inhabitants of Gilead). An assumption by some that ‘Tishbi’ is Nephtali, was rejected by many scholars. According to Josephus, Elijah was an inhabitant of ‘Teshbon’, a province of Gilead. Whereas some others have gone so far to say that Elijah was a Gentile who inhabited Gilead to testify to the living God.

The episode of Elijah will forever exhort us along the generations, not to care to inquire about man’s family nor ancestors, but about his person, life, thoughts, and behavior.

- a- Elijah did not talk to the king in secret, but publicly, on account of that evil has reached to the whole people; and there was need for a loud cry-out to exhort all to return to their God. Hence he says” “*As the Lord God of Israel lives*”, whom the king and his men opposed, and whom the people forgot or disregarded.
- b- God is not lifeless like Baal or Ashtoreth but “*The Lord God of Israel lives*”.
- c- Elijah is the minister who perpetually stands before the living God.

- d- If the king thought that what he enjoys of goods and blessings are gifts from Baal and , Ashtoreth, gods of fertility; It is befitting of him to perceive the helplessness of his idols to provide the rain (Jeremiah 14: 22)
- e- Here, Elijah confirms the importance of prayer; as by it the gates of heaven are shut off for three and a half years, and the idols would not be able to open them up; but it is God who allows for them to open *“at my word”*.
- f- God had previously threatened draught as chastisement against whoever goes astray from Him, and disobeys His commandment (Genesis 11: 17; 28: 23; Leviticus: 26: 19). According to many old Jewish writings, like the Telmud, there happened a debate between the two parties; the king, trusting on his idols, challenged Elijah that the curse of draught declared by Moses, will not happen; while Elijah confirmed that it will certainly do.

2- ELIJAH SUSTAINED BY THE RAVENS: (2 – 7)

“Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying. ‘Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan” (2, 3)

According to an old tradition, the Brook ‘Cherith’, which flows into the Jordan, is a spring (Phasaelis) or (Fassel), located where the mountains descend toward the valley of the Jordan, beyond the city called ‘Phasaelis; Or it probably ‘Wady Kelt’, a little far southward from the “Phasaelis’ Valley. While, according to Josephus, it is on the other bank of the river; To Thenius, it is ‘Wady Rajib’ or ‘Ajrun’; And still to others, it is ‘Wady Alias’.

By a divine command, Elijah had to hide himself until the period of chastisement is over; not to protect him from Ahab and Jezebel, from whom God is capable of

protect him; but rather to give them and the rest of the people a chance to think seriously about repentance, lest they might put pressure on him; instead of seeking mercy from God.

The Lord commanded him to retreat from Samaria, and from the midst of the people, to hide himself three and a half years; after which he had to go back and encounter the king. Those years were not meant to be a period of slothfulness without work; but rather a period of prayer and meditation, that would grant the prophet an increasing strength to support him in his coming mission.

Amid the draught, in that barren wilderness, God provided him with water from the spring or brook 'Cherith', and with food brought to him by the snatching ravens. God would never forget His church; and would never disregard a hungry soul. ... In the Book of Revelation (12: 6, 14), we see God Himself sustain the Church (the woman) who fled to the wilderness.

God sustained Elijah with fresh bread and meat twice a day; when the priests of Baal who "*used to eat at the table of Jezebel*" (1 Kings 18: 19) went hungry because of the draught,, God sustained Elijah in the morning and in the evening, and did not let him worry about the morrow, As to how the bread and the meat were prepared, let us say together with Jacob: "*The Lord God granted me success*" (Genesis 27: 20)

Why did God chose the ravens to sustain Elijah?

a- It was written: "*The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out*" (Proverb 30: 17); Whereas whoever honors his father and obeys the Church, his mother, will be sustained by

the ravens daily with fresh food. Through the love of God "*Out of the eater, came something to eat; and out of the strong, came something*

sweet” (Judges 14: 14).

- b- Even though those birds were considered unclean by the Mosaic law (Leviticus 11: 13-15); and the Jews would never eat anything they provide; but Elijah here, going beyond the letter, eats what is brought forth, not by the ravens, but by God Himself.
- c- The ravens that brought forth bread to Elijah, subsist upon insect for their food. They represent a multitude of God’s ministers who offer the word of God – the heavenly bread; while they themselves subsist on (insects).
- d- As the little raven cannot carry more than tiny pieces of bread and meet, yet Elijah was thankful to God for His gift.
- e- Even if the raven may sometimes forget their little ones, yet they could not forget the man of God; *“The lions (and raven) lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing”* (Psalm 34: 10).
- f- The raven which are, themselves, subsisted through the divine care (Job 38: 14; Psalm 47: 9), are used by the same care to subsist the prophet. They testify against those who disregard the need of their brethren; for it is befitting of whoever enjoys the grace of God to offer to his brethren, spiritual food in the midst of the wilderness of this world.
- g- By a divine command, Elijah separated himself from the people who have gone astray from God, to deal with the raven that served him. By sin, man loses his relationship with God and His men; whereas the irrational animals and birds glorify God and minister to His children.

h- God, the Creator of nature, uses even the serpents, the locusts, the fish, and the clouds of the sky, to minister to Him (2 Chronicles 7: 13; Psalm 78: 23; Isaiah 14: 12; Jonah 2: 10; Amos 9: 3).

i- Offering food through the raven implies three miracles: How, and from where, did the raven get such food, morning and evening? ... How did they overcome their nature; and instead of snatching, they offered delicious food to others? ... And finally, how would they dare and offer food to man, with no fear of him?

Some claim that the word translated as 'orebim', refers to the Arabs who inhabit 'Orbo'; nomadic traders belonging to caravans coming from Arabia. This view is however rejected by many scholars, on account of that, it was not a way used by caravans. And on another aspect, God commanded Elijah to separate himself from anyone, to keep the king from knowing his whereabouts; And finally, this word was never used in the Holy Book to refer to traders.

Those raven may refer to the believers who perceive that, by themselves, they are sinners and defiled; but through the rich grace of God, their defilement turns into purity; ... The grace of God renews their nature; and instead of their selfishness, they long to give, and to offer a continuous spiritual banquet to others; not made by their own hands, nor through their human possibilities; but as a divine gift to them.... Finally they never fear to offer the living word of God as a delicious and fresh food to the souls.

According to St Ambrose, the word 'Cherith' means (understanding), and 'Horeb' means (a heart) or (like a heart).

“And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the raven to feed you there” (4)

+ For Elijah, there was no place to be fed except “**there**” (4), in Zarephath, where he was commanded by God to go.

Jacob, likewise, was commanded by God to go “**there**”, to Bethel (Genesis 35: 1).

And the Lord Christ commanded his disciples to return to Jerusalem, and to “*tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they are endued with power from up high*” (Luke 24: 49; Hebrew 1: 4; 12: 2: 4).

We are invited to go “**there**”, to dwell or to Abide in Christ, and He in us (John 15: 4-7; Ephesians 1: 3).

In the time of draught, when the physical vanity could dry up in man, he can go into more understanding of God. Elijah went to the Brook of Cherish (17: 3), which means (understanding), where he can drink from the abundance of God’s understanding.

He fled from the world in a way, not seek even food for his body, except what those little ministering birds provided him (17: 6). Although his food, most probably, was not from the earth (5-7). He actually walked 40 days, sustained by that little food he got (5).

That great prophet did not flee from a woman, but from this world; he did not fear death, but delivered himself to Him who seeks his soul, saying to the Lord, “*Take my life*” (19: 4)..He suffered from the troubles of this life; yet fled from the seductions of the world; from the defiled behavior, and the evil works, of that evil sinning generation.

“So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meet in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the Brook” (5, 6)

+ Elijah, the man of God, had no bread to eat, but it so seems that he did not fail, for he did not search for any, for he was rich with God.

Richness is not a requirement for life to be blessed, as is clear from the word of the Lord, saying; *“Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God; Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled; Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh”* (Luke 6: 20, 21); By which he makes clear that poverty, hunger, and sufferings, that are considered as evils, would not be obstacles to reach the blessed life, , but would even help to reach it.

(St. Ambrose)

“And it happened after a while that the Brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land” (7)

There will be time when the brooks of this world will dry up; for nature, with all its possibilities, has limits to stop at. The river of Elijah dried up, for there was no rain for some time; Whereas whoever lifts his eyes up to heaven, to the city of God, For him, no streams of water will dry up in summer (Job 6: 15), but will find

a river that brings joy to the city of God, that will never dry up (Psalm 46: 4); and a fountain of living water that will never cease to flow.

God who commanded Elijah to set forth to the Brook Of Cherith, will certainly provide for a solution when it dries up; according to the words of the psalmist, saying, *“Oh, continue Your loving kindness to those who know you”* (Psalm 36: 10). The rivers of the world may dry up; but God’s loving kindness will never do; nor will fail to quench the thirst of the souls.

3- ELIJAH SUSTAINED BY THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH: (8-16)

“Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying: ‘Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you’” (8-9)

Sending Elijah to that gentile widow, was not only a sign of God’s care for His children, but of His care for the Gentile woman to receive Elijah in her house, to bless what she has got. About this, the Lord Christ says: *“Many women were in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow”* (Luke 4: 25, 26). Elijah was the first prophet sent to minister to the Gentiles; hated by his own people, he resorted to the Gentiles, as testified by the apostles (Acts 18:6); by which he bore a testimony about the Lord Christ, who came to His own, and His own did not receive Him; came to the lost sheep of Israel, and, being rejected by them, He opened the door before the Gentiles to receive His salvation work, and His exalted love.

‘Zarephath’: a small village located on the Mediterranean Sea coast between Tyre and Sidon.

+ *"I have commanded a widow there to provide for you" (9)*

By His command, God proclaimed what is good by His grace for the soul. That is how God proclaims to every man who consummates the good work; for no man would be glorified by himself, but in the Lord. ... Was there not a single Jewish woman worthy of giving food to the blessed Elijah; to be sent to a Gentile widow to do that? ... That widow to whom the prophet was sent symbolizes the church; as the ravens that ministered to the prophet, do to the Gentiles. Elijah thus came to the widow; the way Christ will come to the church.

(St. Augustine)

Why did God choose Sidon?!

He let Elijah resort to the same city where Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon came from; she who provoked the people of Israel by force to idol-worship.... From the same location where corruption came, a believing widow was found to enjoy the blessing of the living God. ... While the land of Israel was defiled by the uncleanness of idol-worship, the land of Sidon enjoyed the presence of a widow, to get what all the widows of Israel had not; ... She came to be a symbol of the church of the New Covenant, coming from the Gentiles. No marvel that the Lord Christ ministered on the coast of Sidon (Matthew 15 21).

God did not send Elijah to be sustained by a rich merchants or a great man in Sidon, nor to its king, but to a poor widow, to eat from her hands, and to dwell in her house.. .. She is a symbol of the church of the New Covenant, that opens her heart to the Lord Christ, the Lord of the prophets; He chose her a widow, whose first husband (the idol-worship) died; a poor, ignorant, and a lowly woman, to pour upon her His wisdom, riches, and glory. As, according to the apostle Paul: *"God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise; and*

God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1: 27).

“So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there, gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink” (10)

Elijah approached the widow while she was gathering sticks to prepare food for herself and her little son; as the Lord approaches the souls, hungry for the truth, that wish to eat and get satisfied; to provide them with eternal food.

“And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand. Then she said, ‘As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bun, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die” (11, 12)

It is obvious that the famine was not only on the land of Israel, but covered the lands of Tyre and Sidon as well; on account of that the corruption that dwelt upon Israel also extended over the surrounding nations. ... When Abraham came to enter into a covenant with God, God made him a blessing, by whom all the nations would be blessed (Exodus 15); ... And when Jonah fled from the face of the Lord, many sailors lost their possessions, by throwing them overboard. ... The spiritual man radiates joy over those around him; and the wicked draws many with him to corruption.

The widow did not say: 'As the Lord my God lives', but said, "*As the Lord your God lives*". Which was a touch of faith in the living God of Elijah.... Had she some doubt in Baal and Ashtoreth, and did she believe in the living God?

- + He went out to bring water and to gather sticks of wood. Let us now meditate in what the water and the wood mean. We do know that both of them are joyful and necessary for the church; as it is written, "*He shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water*" (Psalm 1: 3). In the wood, appears the secret of the cross, and in the water the secret of baptism. Hence she got out to gather "a couple" of sticks of wood, and to Elijah who asked her for food, she said: "*As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bun, and a little oil in a jar, and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat and die*".

That widow, as I said, symbolizes the church, and her son symbolizes the brethren.

She did not say one, three, or four sticks, but a couple of sticks; she gathered (two) sticks for she received Christ in Elijah His symbol; She intended to gather two sticks of wood, for she intended to know the secret of the cross. (for the cross of our Lord and Savior was made of two pieces of wood). So did the widow, the symbol of the church, who believed in Christ, hanged on the cross; She said, "*I am gathering a couple of sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat and die*". Indeed, O beloved brethren, No one is worthy to believe in Christ crucified, unless he dies to the past and lives for the future.

(St. Augustine)

“And Elijah said to her, ‘Do not fear, go and do as you have said, but make me small cake from it first, and bring it to me, and afterwards make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.. So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah. And she, and he, and her household ate for many days” (13-15)

She responded without debating with him (10). Having delivered her life with content into the hands of God, She did not complain from the toughness of life, nor from the famine that dwelt upon the land. She was characterized by generosity and love of giving. Despite perceiving from the prophet's attire, that he is an Israeli prophet, and not a priest of Baal; a stranger to her, Yet she did not hesitate to go get water for him to drink.

“The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke to Elijah” (16)

- + While the draught made the barrels of the rich run dry; the little jar of oil of the widow flowed in abundance.
For there was none who gave more than she who gave the prophet the food of her son, there was none more worthy than her.

(St.Ambrose)

- + Despite her poverty and hunger, she did not hesitate to obey, nor preferred her son over Elijah, ... Yes, she has done what in the sight of

God a subject of his pleasure; when she gave readily and easily what she was asked to do; she was asked, not for a portion of what she had, nor what was left of what she had, but was asked to give all the little she got, to make the other eat, even before her hungry son.

- + She had not known Christ, nor heard his commandments, or saved by His cross and passion, to give food and drink for the sake of His blood. That shows how sinful are, those in the church, who, preferring themselves or their children over Christ; keep their wealth, and do not give generously to the needy.

(Cyprian the martyr)

- + The widow of Zarephath who expected the death of her son, the same evening by hunger, came back to feed the prophet. And he, who came to eat, came back to feed her and her son through a miracle; by filling the empty vessels.
- + Let us then remember the widow of Zarephath who cared to satisfy the hunger of Elijah, more than to preserve her life and that of her son. Despite being sure that, unless they find something to eat, she and her son would certainly die in the same evening, she decided to let her guest survive; she chose to sacrifice her, and her son's life, rather than disregard the duty of giving.

In the little food in her hand, she found a seed from which she would reap a harvest given to her by the lord

While in the land of Judah, a grain of wheat was rare, owing to the famine, oil flowed like a river in the house of the heathen widow.

(St.

Jerome)

- + There are some who like to put a limitation for love! But if you intend to love Christ, stretch your hand with love over the whole world; for the members of Christ are all over the world.

(St. Augustine)

Presenting to us a symbolic interpretation of this episode, St. Ambrose says that it bears a secret – that of Christ and the church.

- + It is not without goal that that widow was preferred to many widows; For to whom such a great prophet was sent, particularly during a period when heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a great famine prevailed over the whole land?

Those three and a half years, probably refer to the period during which the Lord Christ came to the earth, and found no fruit on the fig tree? to proclaim: *“For three years I have come seeking fruit in this fig tree and found none”*(Luke 13: 7).

She is certainly that widow about whom was said: *“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”* (Isaiah 54: 1). She is that widow, about whom it was well said: *“Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed, nor be disgraced; 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" (Isaiah 54: 4). Or she probably is a widow who lost her man indeed in the sufferings of His body (His crucifixion); Yet on the day of judgment, she will receive Him anew; the Son of Man, who seemed as though was lost, says to her: *"For a mere moment, I have forsaken you"* (Isaiah 54: 7); For, having become forsaken, she would be more glorified by keeping her faith.

(St. Ambrose)

- + She is the widow for whose sake, when there happened to be a famine for the word of God on the earth, prophets were sent to keep her . Hence, the person of Elijah does not seem to be of little importance; he, by whose word he wet the dry earth with the dew of heaven, and opened the closed heaven by a definitely non-human power; For who could open up the heaven but the Lord Christ? Who would have the power to say: *"The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth"*(17: 14). For although that was the way the prophet spoke, yet it is actually the voice of the Lord; hence the prophet first says: *"For so says the Lord"*. It is the Lord who grants continuous heavenly secrets, promises unceasing spiritual joy, grant protection of life, a seal of faith, and gifts of virtues.

But what does he mean by saying: *"Until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth"*, but, that He is the One who *"shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; like showers that water the earth"* (Psalm 72: 6).

In this phrase he reveals the ancient secret, when Gideon the warrior in the secret battle, received the deposit of his conquest to come, and perceived the spiritual secret in the vision of his mind; namely, that the

rain is the dew of the divine word that came first upon the fleece, while the surrounding land was suffering from perpetual dryness; then through another sign, when the whole surrounding land was wet with rain; while there was dryness upon the fleece (Judges 6: 37).

For the dew of the divine utterance came first in the land of Judah, presenting wetness, while the whole surrounding land was deprived of the dew of faith; But once the flock of Joseph rejected the glory of God, the divine rain came down on the whole earth, while the Jews burned with the dryness of faith.. When the clouds of the apostles rained the healthy water, the holy church gathered together from all over the world; that was the rain that comes down from the mountain to cover the whole world as words of benefit from the Holy Heavenly Books.

(St. Ambrose)

The widow was characterized, as well, by trusting in the promises of God, and obeying him. For when Elijah conveyed to her a divine promise amid circumstances of extreme toughness, she trusted in the Lord's word, on his mouth.

As to Elijah, he was trained to be satisfied in everything. When he threatened the king with draught, he never thought about himself how he would survive such a draught; believing that God would provide for his needs in some way; He received with thanksgiving the tiny bits and pieces of bread and meat carried to him by the ravens twice a day. Now his food came to be only cake, with neither meat nor vegetables. So it will be with him who encounters God, and practices the life of faith, he will never feel a need for anything, but will say together with the apostle: *"I have learned both to be full and to be hungry"* (Philippians 4: 12)..

4- ELIJAH RAISES THE SON OF THE WIDOW FROM THE DEAD:

“Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him” (17)

As the widow of Zarephath represented the church of the New Covenant that comes from the Gentiles, her son who died represents every human soul in the world, and her work is to present these dead souls to the Lord Christ the Grantor of the resurrection. Having experienced the new resurrected life, she cannot endure to see a dead man, with no breath left in him.

It so seems that he was her only son, the object of her comfort as a widow, and she had no hope of having another one. Although her son ate from that secret food, through the blessing that came upon the bin of flour and the jar of oil; Yet that did not keep him from getting sick or dead. He was in need of enjoying the eternal food; And as said by the Lord Christ: *“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world”* (John 6: 49-51)

Why did God allow for the death of the widow's son?

That widow enjoyed the first miracle mentioned in the Holy Book, concerning blessing food in abundance. ,, She enjoyed, as well, sustaining Elijah, the great among the prophets, something that the believers long to enjoy up to this moment, and the church anticipates his coming to support her in her war against the anti-Christ. ... She sustained, and was sustained by that prophet for free; That is why God allowed for her to pass through that temptation, as a bitter thorn

in her flesh, to take away from her the war of pride. She was in need of such anguish to have her life abide in the Lord without shaking.

“So she said to Elijah: ‘What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?’ (18)

It so seems that the death of her child was so sudden, that she had no chance to tell Elijah about his sickness, while he was in the upper room, but talked to him after he has already died in her bosom.

Knowing that heaven closes up before the sinful earth, She feared that the perdition of her son was caused by a sin she had committed toward God and His prophet..

With the same spirit, the disciples asked the Lord Christ about the one born blind, saying, *“Rabbi, Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? To which Jesus answered, ... That the work of God should be revealed in him”* (John 9: 3). Here, as well, the same answer would be given to that pure Gentile widow, to perceive what the apostle Paul later said: *“Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes He is also the God of the gentiles”* (Romans 3: 29).

She probably assumed that the coming of the prophet Elijah to her house, and his dwelling in it, has drawn God’s attention to her, to find in her an iniquity worthy of chastisement.

+ But we should know that death is not for punishment; For the saints have been submitted to it; and even the Lord of all saints – Jesus Christ – died, He who is the life of the believers, and the resurrection from the dead.

(The laws of the apostles)

In the midst of her bitterness, that gentile widow, calls Elijah; *“Man of God”*.

“And he said to her, ‘Give me your son’. So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord my God, have you also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?’”(20)

By those words of admonition spoken to God by the prophet Elijah, he meant the following:

- a- To confirm that both life and death are allowed by God
- b- That he bears a kind of compassionate fatherhood toward the dead child
- c- That what happened was not the fruit of sin committed by the widow or her son.

“Then he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him’”
(21)

Why did he stretch himself on the child?

We shall not enjoy the new resurrected life, unless we get in touch with the One resurrected from the dead. There have to be a practical spiritual touch. That is

why, even in healing the sick, the Lord Christ used to stretch His hand and touch them to heal them (Matthew 9: 25; Luke 7: 14).

The prophet Elijah was unique among the prophet; On one aspect, he performed the first miracle of blessing the food to endure for about two years; And on another aspect he believed in God, capable of raising from the dead. While the prophet David did not dare to seek from the Lord to raise his son from Bathsheba from the dead; Elijah, on the other hand was the first prophet who dared to seek from God to allow for the soul of that child to come back to him.

On another aspect, God intended to confirm an important fact of faith; that everything in man, and everything he has, is sanctified, as long as he walks with Him. God used the rod of Moses to perform miracles, the bones of Elisha to raise a dead man, and the shadow of the apostle Peter, and the handkerchiefs of the apostle Paul, to heal the sick. Here He used the body of the prophet Elijah to stretch on the dead child, and to seek from the Lord to bring him back to life.

+ By the prayers of the prophet Elijah, the son of the widow was raised from the dead; And by the coming of the Lord Christ, the Son of the church; namely the Christian people, came out of the prison of death. When Elijah bowed down in prayer; the son of the widow came back to life; Likewise, when Christ plunged in His passions; He restored the Christian people to life.

Why did Elijah stretch himself out three times on the child? ... I am sure, by your understanding, you have perceived it before I utter it.

By doing it three times, he demonstrated the secret of the holy trinity. The whole trinity have restored life to the son of the widow; namely, to the Gentiles. Besides, that is also realized in the secret of baptism, when the old man is dipped three times in water, to qualify the new man to resurrect.

(St. Augustine)

“Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, ‘See, your son lives’” (22, 23)

It so seems that the widow could not believe her own eyes; could not believe that her child who died is restored to life, that is why Elijah says to her: ‘See, your son (and not anyone else) lives’”.

“Then the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth’ (24)

This chapter reveals the person of the prophet Elijah as a forerunner of the Lord Christ -- “the Resurrection”; the Grantor of the new resurrected life.

From the first instants of her encounter with Elijah, the widow dealt with him as a man of God; preferred him to her son and herself; hence the lord granted her the blessing of the dwelling of the prophet in her upper room; and blessed her flour and oil. Now, having raised her son from the dead, she became sure that he is a man of God, and that what he utters of the words of the Lord are the truth; She proclaimed her faith in the divine truth.

Through that episode, the widow enjoyed many blessings:

- She searched her heart, her depths, and tested her way.
- She discovered the power of God, Grantor of the resurrection.
- She testified to God that He is the Truth.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 17

WHO WILL SAVE MY SOUL FROM FAMINE?

WHO WILL SATISFY MY DEPTHS, BUT YOU?

- + Ahab trusted in Baal as being the god of goods and fertility;
And denied himself from You, the Creator of heaven and earth;
To You, I cry out: The famine has dwelt upon my depths;
The draught has prevailed upon my heart;
The rain of the Spirit ceased to water my soul.
- + Send me together with the prophet Elijah to Cherith; Send the ravens to me;

Count me among the few remnants;
Sustain me, O the satisfier of souls.
- + Amid the atmosphere of the wicked kings, you sent the fiery Elijah;
You set him up to work for the sake of the holy few to your account;
The wicked queen did not seek less than his head;
As for you, You satisfied his soul;
You cared even for his food;
The snatching ravens carried bread and meet to him;
The king searched for him, but did not find him;
The ravens brought him food morning and evening.

- + All suffered from hunger; but You satisfied the widow of Zarephath;
She and her son were satisfied because she preferred Your prophet to herself;
She gained a blessing, many Israelite widows have not;
You raised her child from the dead to let her rejoice in the work of Your hand;
- + You are the bread of life
The world may forget about me; but You care for my whole being
My soul, my mind, my body, and all my energies are in Your hands
You are the satisfier of my whole life.

AN ANNEX TO 1 KINGS 17

THE PROPHET ELIJAH

The word 'Elijah' means (Jehovah is my God), which suits his mission; as he was characterized by courage with zeal for the sake of the Lord his God. He lived in Israel (the Northern kingdom) in the first half of the ninth century B.C.; and appeared in a secret way, We know nothing of his family; he was called 'the Tishbite', on account of that he was probably born in "Tishbi" within the portion of Nephtali (Tobia 1: 22), or in the region of Galilee, or from a family that carried that name; but he was raised in Gilead (1 kings 17: 1).

We can divide his life into five stages:

- 1- Appearing before Ahab, the apostate, and chastising him by years of draught [his encounter with the widow of Zarephath on the Mediterranean Sea coast – Killing the prophets of the Baal] (1 kings 17-18).

- 2- Having to flee to Mount Horeb from the face of Jezebel [God appears to him in the same cave in which Moses saw the glory of God – Choosing Elisha as his disciple] (1 kings 19).
- 3- Propheying the destruction of the house of Ahab, because of killing Naboth (1 kings 210).
- 4- Rebuking Ahaziah the son of Ahab [burning the two centurions by a fire from heaven] (2 kings 1).
- 5- Ascending to heaven (2 kings 1).

His circumstances:

Elijah appeared in the days of Ahab king of Israel, who did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all those before him (1 kings 16:30); and who got married to Jezebel the Canaanites, daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and priest of Baal.. Having a weak personality, Ahab followed the counsel of his wife, who persecuted the priests and prophets of God, some of whom were killed, and some fled to the caves. By her evil, and helped by the priests of Baal, she could provoke the people to idol-worship with all its abominations. Characterized with violence, she planned for the killing of Naboth the Jezreelite whose vineyard, her man Ahab longed to have.

How the Holy Book sees him:

In Malachi 4: 5, 6 the Lord promised to send the prophet Elijah before the great day of the Lord; which was realized on the Lord's first coming; as it is mentioned in Luke 1: 17, that St. John the Baptist came with the spirit and power of Elijah. With this meaning the Lord Christ said that Elijah came in the person of John (Matthew 11: 14; 17: 10-12'; Mark 9: 12).. And some Jews wrongly assumed that Jesus Himself is Elijah Matthew 16: 14; Mark 6: 15; 8: 28; Luke 19: 9: 9).

Elijah, together with Enoch will come in the days of the anti-Christ, to support the church, and to be martyred

How the Jews see him:

In the Jewish tradition it came that Elijah did not die, but still wandering on earth; and will appear to introduce the Messiah, and to help in the ultimate salvation of humanity.

In the circumcision of the Jewish child, a chair is set aside as “Elijah’s chair”, well decorated and adorned; assigned to him, being the “The messenger (or the angel) of the covenant”, as it came in Malachi 3: 1; With the hope that he will protect the child. And an invitation is addressed to Elijah to come over and join the celebration.

According to some, the wicked Jezabel forbade the circumcision of children in the northern kingdom, or at the least corrupted its rite. Elijah, full of zeal resorted to a cave to complain to God (1 kings 19:P 10), that Israel had forgotten His covenant. God, then, gave the command that no child should be circumcised except in the presence of Elijah. Hence came the custom to assign a chair for Elijah during the circumcision; to say with a loud voice: ‘This is the chair of Elijah; And before the beginning of the rite, the child is put on that chair, as though to place him in the bosom of Elijah to protect him.

During the banquet of the circumcision, an extra cup of wine is filled for Elijah, beside an empty chair assigned for him at the table; and all the time of the banquet the door remains open, with the hope that he will come and join them. The chair remains in its place three days to keep the child safe during those critical days after circumcision

In the praises on the eve of the Passover, the Jews sing:

Elijah the prophet;
Elijah the Tishbite;
Elijah of Gilead;
Let him hasten to come;
And with him the Messiah.

In the Haggadah, it came that Elijah was a priest; a view which was adopted by many of the fathers of the church, like St. Aphrahat, St. Epiphanius, bishop of Seramis; and the scholar Origen.

While, according to some Jewish Interpreters, Elijah was an angel in a human body; hence had neither parents nor descendants.

As a forerunner before the coming of the Lord, Elijah performs the following miracles before the people:

- 1- He presents to them Moses and the generation that crossed over the wilderness.
- 2- He causes the raising of Korah and his group up from the earth.
- 3- He brings back to them the lost holy articles of the altar: the ark of the covenant, the pot of manna, the vessel of holy oil.
- 4- He reveals to them the rod he got from the Lord.
- 5- He demolishes the mountains like straw.

His personality:

Elijah is likened to a bright light that shined all of a sudden in a dark period of history to proclaim the divine Truth. ... A witness of Truth amid vanity ... A burning spark, cast by God to ignite the cold souls, and to confront the evil Ahab, his arrogant wife Jezebel, and the people rushing ahead toward idol-worship.

As the events of his life mostly bore an element of surprise, It made some Jewish scholars assume that he was an angel, who sometimes appear in a human form, then disappears; That in the 'Haggadah', he was called "the bird of heaven", flying in the world to carry heavenly messages.

- He suddenly appeared in history, and we know nothing about his family.
- He suddenly ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot.
- He suddenly appeared together with the Lord Christ in His transfiguration on the Mount.
- All his movements carried the same element: like:
 - * His encounter with king Ahab to proclaim stopping the rain for the duration of three and a half years (1 kings 17: 1; 18: 1).
 - * His encounter with the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17: 10)
 - * His encounter with an angel who fed him (1 kings 19: 5).
 - * His encounter with God through a still small voice (1 Kings 19: 12).
 - * His encounter with Elisha, and choosing him a disciple (1 Kings 19: 19)
 - * His encounter with Ahab who spared the life of Benhadad (1 King 20: 39)
 - * His encounter with the messengers of king Ahaziah the son of Ahab, whom he sent to inquire of Baalzebub, god of Ekron whether he will recover from his injury; And the word of the Lord on his tongue were: *"You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die"* (2 kings 1: 4).

According to some Jews, Elijah often appears to the righteous in dreams, as well as while awake; and his presence is felt even by the irrational animals; the dogs bark joyfully when seeing him. In many Jewish stories, Elijah appeared as a guardian angel to support the godly by any means, to save them from troubles; to give them peace, and to teaches them,

Elijah was a man of prayer; although *"with a nature like ours"* (James 5: 17), yet, being righteous, his prayer were of mighty action.

His mission:

1- Opposing the apostasy, and rejecting idol-worship.

* His God granted him authority over: heaven (rain and fire); over birds (the snatching raven sustained him); on life (proclaiming that Jezebel's blood will be shed; and the death of Ahaziah son of Ahab); On nature (blessing the bin of flour and the jar of oil of the widow).

* Failure of the heathen idols, gods of fertility, to act: They could not reverse the draught that dwelt by a word from Elijah; They could not protect the priests of Baal; And they could not send fire to consume the sacrifice.

2- Opposing the oppression and violence: (punishing Jezebel for killing and inheriting Nabot)

His features:

1- He reached the climax of conquest on Mount Carmel; when heaven testified to the Truth; and the priests of Baal were killed. And he reached the climax of despair in Beersheba, when he desired death.

2- He was granted authority on heaven

* He closed it, and proclaimed draught for three and a half years.

* He sought fire from heaven to come down and consume the two captains of fifties and their fifty men (2 kings 1)

* He sought fire from heaven to come down and consume the sacrifice before the prophets of Baal.

* He was granted authority over water; when he divided the River Jordan by his mantle (2 kings 2: 8)

* He raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 kings 17).

3- According to some, he was “the prophet of thunder”; who stood before a wicked king and an idol-worshipping people; “A prophet of judgment” (a symbol of the Old Covenant); Whereas his disciple Elisha was “the prophet of grace, love, and compassion”. It is as though, by thunder, Elijah paved the way for grace.

4- He knew how to encounter with God, and with His creatures.

- * He encountered with God through a still and a small voice; a peaceful encounter of love.

- * He encountered with a heavenly angel who supported him with food and drink

- * He encountered with ravens that provided him with bread and meat, on a daily basis.

- * He encountered with the wicked king to testify to the Truth without fear.

- * He encountered with a widow who sustained him and gave him a place to live.

5- His **faith** in God knows no limits; With an amazing trust in God, and perception of His authority, working in His men; No risk, nor events or persons could shake his faith and trust in God.

6- * His **zeal** concerning God, worship, and holiness, were the true motives behind all his actions, the backbone of his whole life. He truly said all the time: *“I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts”* (19: 14)..

- * His **courage**: unique and never failing; he stood alone, weaponless, before the wicked king with all his possibilities.

- * His **obedience**: simply, and without questions, he kept the commandment and will of God, like a child with his father.

- * His very **gentle feelings and compassion**, he commiserated with the widow who lost her only son; and moaned together with his people.

- * His **dedication** to the Lord; He hated and opposed sin, whatever the cost may be.

* By His **nature** he supported and saved the others; he suddenly appeared to work, performed miracles, then disappeared; worked to the account of God and His people.

Elijah, the man of the wilderness:

Elijah lived in the wilderness, a hermit in his attire, as well as in his food; wore a sackcloth, and a leather belt around his waist (2 kings 1: 8). The world had no place in his heart. In the wilderness, he was taught the spiritual war, to graduate as a warrior fit to fight in the divine battle against idol-worship and oppression; and was taught the life of fasting (he fasted forty days and forty nights), when he traveled to Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai).

- + We should look at Elijah the Tishbite as a magnificent role model of modest satisfaction. Sitting underneath the thorns and thistles, the angels provided him with just a cake of barley and a cup of water, which was the best for him. That is why, in our journey toward the truth, it is befitting of us to be light; according to the words of the Lord: "*Go your way, carry neither money bag, sack, nor sandals*" (Luke 3, 4); meaning, do not possess what need to be put in a bag or sack; keep company of the needy; and do not get confused with a burden of horses and servants, like the rich people; whom he symbolically call 'sandals'.

We should do without a plenty of golden and silver cups and plates, and a multitude of servants; to follow the lead of the Lord in depending upon ourselves, and on simplicity, to head toward the Word, as is befitting.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- + That is not the way of whoever becomes a servant of wealth; who cannot lift his eyes up to his master, or dare to utter a word to the account of virtue; For his love of riches and glory, would terrorize and humiliate him. Nothing would take freedom away from man, like being confused with worldly things and anxiety ... For such a man would have, not just one master, nor two or three, but tens of thousands of masters.

(St. John Chrysostom)

He lived a virgin; dedicating all his energies to testify to God.

- + How foolish to gather Elijah and Elisha together to the list of married people. In the Holy Scripture, it is written that John the Baptist came with the spirit and power of Elijah; And as John was a virgin, it is obvious that he came, not only with the spirit of Elijah, but with his physical chastity, as well.

(St.

Jerome)

Elijah, as a symbol of the Lord Christ:

- + The blessed Elijah symbolizes our Lord and Savior:
As Elijah was persecuted by the Jews, so was our Lord – the true Elijah, persecuted and despised by the Jews.
As Elijah has forsaken his people, the Lord Christ has forsaken the Synagogue.
As Elijah departed to the wilderness; the Lord Christ came to the world.
As Elijah was fed in the wilderness by the ravens, the Lord Christ was revived in the wilderness of this world by the faith of the Gentiles.

Caring for the blessed Elijah by a command from the Lord, the ravens symbolized the Gentiles. That is why it is said of the church of the Gentiles: *"I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem"* (Songs 1: 5). Why is the church dark and lovely? ... She is dark by nature, according to the words: *"I was brought forth by iniquity; and in sin, my mother conceived me"* (Psalm 51: 5); ... And she is lovely by grace, according to the words: *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"* (Psalm 51: 7); and, the apostle says: *"I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members"* (Romans 7: 23); She is beautiful because: *"Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"* (Romans 7: 24); but the grace of God by our Lord Jesus Christ . Yes indeed, the church of the Gentiles was like a raven, before she received the grace, when she despised the living Lord; when she served the idols as dead bodies.

- + As our Lord resurrected and ascended to heaven, after performing great powers, and enduring His passion; So Elijah was taken up to heaven on a chariot of fire; after a multitude of miracles done by God through him.
- + As Elijah prayed for rain to fall on earth; the Lord Christ prayed for the divine grace to dwell upon the hearts of men. Ordering his servant "to go and look seven times" (1 kings 18: 43); he meant the seven-fold grace of the Holy Spirit, to be given to the church.

And when the servant proclaimed that *"there is a small cloud, rising out of the sea"* (1 kings 18: 44), it was a reference to the body of Christ, born in the sea of this world; And lest someone may doubt, he said: *"as a man's hand"*; surely, that man who says: *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"*(Matthew 16: 13).

After three years and six months, rain fell from heaven, by a prayer from Elijah; because, by the coming of our Lord and Savior, the rain of the word of God watered the whole world, through the three years and six months of His preaching. ... And as when Elijah came, all the priests of the idols were killed and perished, So it was when the True Elijah, our Lord Jesus Christ came, all the evil practices of idol-worship perished.

(St.

Augustine)

Moses and Elijah:

The two persons of Moses and Elijah are often connected together, particularly by their appearance, and no other prophets of the Old Covenant, at the transfiguration of the Lord Christ; and their enjoyment, and no other prophets of fasting forty days.

MOSES	ELIJAH
Encountered with God in Horeb (Genesis 3: 1-6)	Had the same encounter at the place (1 kings 9: 8-11)
To him God proclaimed Himself with fire (Exodus 3: 21)	The fire of God came down upon the sacrifice (2 kings 18: 38)
God fed him manna from heaven (Exodus 16)	God sent ravens to feed him (1 Kings 17: 8-6)
He confirmed to Israel that the Lord is God (Deuteronomy 6: 4)	He did the same thing (1 kings 18: 37-39)
He was succeeded by Joshua (meaning Jehovah is Savior)	He was succeeded by Elisha (meaning God is salvation)
His death came in secret (Deuteronomy 34)	He ascended to heaven in secret (2 kings 2: 11, 12)

By the Jordan he delivered the leadership to Joshua	By the Jordan he delivered the leadership to Elisha (2 kings 2: 13, 14)
He appeared with the Lord Christ in (Matthew the transfiguration (Matthew 17: 3)	He enjoyed the same thing 17: 3)

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CHAPTER 18

A FIRE FROM HEAVEN

In the last chapter, Elijah was committed to flee and to work in secret. By the Brook of Cherith he was sustained by the ravens; and in Zarephath he lived in the upper room, where no one heard of his presence, of the blessing of the flour and oil; nor of raising the son of the widow from the dead. Now, as the time came for him to testify to God by a publicly seen heavenly fire, he got the divine command to present himself to king Ahab.

1- A divine call to Elijah to present himself to king Ahab	1 - 2
2- Elijah encounters Obadiah	3 - 16
3- Elijah encounters king Ahab	17 - 18
4- Elijah encounters the people	19 - 24
5- Elijah encounters the priests of Baal	25 - 29
6- Killing the priests of Baal	40
7- Elijah's request for rain	41 – 46

1- A DIVINE CALL TO ELIJAH TO PRESENT HIMSELF TO KING AHAB:

By the dwelling of draught upon Israel for the duration of three years and six months, God gave a chance to Ahab to return to Him in repentance, which he did not do, but he rather increased his violence, and accused Elijah of being "*the troubler of Israel*". There was nothing before such an arrogant and stony heart, except to face a firm divine verdict; through a proclamation of His divine presence before the whole people by a fire that consumes the sacrifice; that would make the people return to God, and kill the priests of Baal, as a shadow of the eternal perdition that would dwell upon the arrogant apostate souls from faith. Hence was God's call to Elijah to present himself to Ahab.

“Now it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, ‘Go present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth’” (1)

“In the third year”, does not mean from the start of the draught, but from Elijah’s encounter with the widow of Zarephath. In Luke 4: 25; and James 5: 17, it came that, in the days of Elijah, rain stopped for three and a half years; which indicates that Elijah spent a year by the Brook of Cherith; then two and a half years in Zarephath in the widow’s house; then encountered Ahab at the beginning of the third year.

The call for Elijah to present himself to Ahab was to give the later another chance to repent, not through words, but through a bitter chastisement, by stirring up the people against the priests of Baal, to kill them; beside a strong touch of hope, when God sends rain on the face of the earth.

“So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria” (2)

Having got the divine command, Elijah departed at once to encounter Ahab, without discussing with the Lord how he could protect himself against that apostate king, and his blood-thirsty wife. He went and saw with his own eyes the extent of the famine that dwelt upon Israel during his absence away from the people.

2- ELIJAH ENCOUNTERS OBADIAH:

“And Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly)” (3)

The extent of famine that dwelt upon the people because of the draught, seen by Elijah; revealed, as well, a more serious famine that dwelt upon their hearts and souls, having forsaken God and worshipped the Baal; whether through the seduction of sin and abominations, or through being deceived that Baal is the god of rain and fertility; or for fear of being killed by the priests of Baal.

While the people were suffering a devastating hunger, the king must have imported wheat from Egypt for himself and the royal household, and to feed his horses and mules, for the sake of which he sought from Obadiah who was in charge of his house to partake of searching for sources of water in the valleys. For him, his animals were far more important than his people.

As for the queen she was only preoccupied, even during famine, with killing the prophets of the Lord (13).

The priests and the Levites, either fled to Judah (2 Chronicles 11: 13-14), to minister in the temple; or some of them were seduced by Jezebel to deflect to serve Baal for greater wages.

The prophets of the Lord most probably, on an individual or family level, were secretly testifying to the Truth, seeking the return to God. Having had no place to hold public meetings, they resorted to secret work, lest if discovered by the queen, they would be killed.

Amid such an ugly atmosphere: an angry nature, a selfish king, an idol-worshipping, wicked, and blood-thirsty queen, apostate people, escapees priests and Levites; and helpless prophets, there were a very few individuals who remained faithful to the Lord; among whom was Obadiah, who was in charge of the king's house, and feared the Lord (3. he hid a hundred prophet of the Lord in caves, and fed them with bread and water (13)).

We should not marvel that the evil Ahab had chosen such a godly man to trust in his faithfulness to be in charge of his house; As in every generation there have been such faithful men, who feared the Lord, for God to use, even in the darkest atmospheres. Some Babylonian kings found no one as faithful as the captive Daniel, to appoint as a ruler over all the province of Babylon; the Pharaoh of Egypt found no one to rule over his household and country as Joseph; and Ahab found no one as faithful as Obadiah.

No doubt, Obadiah's soul suffered all the time, while watching how the wicked Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord; and how she plotted to draw all the people of Israel to idol-worship. He did not withdraw from his position as the man in charge of the royal house; but remained there, believing that he was committed by the Lord to carry out a certain divine mission.

The Lord did not commit us to retreat from the wicked world. In His farewell prayer the Lord Christ said to the Father: *"I do not pray that You should take them (His disciples) out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one"* (John 17: 15).

- + As there was still a necessity to keep them in the world; although not to belong to it; hence the Lord adds the phrase, saying: *"Because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world"* (John 17: 14).

Although Obadiah did not talk to the king and the queen about the fear of the Lord, yet he did so through his faithfulness and his living spiritual behavior. Although he could not manage to change their hearts; yet he carried out an important task by hiding and sustaining a hundred of God's prophets; and to be an intermediary for an encounter of Elijah with the king.

The word 'Obadiah' means (the servant of Jehovah), like 'Abdalla' in the Arabic language. The king did not attempt to change his name to make it refer to Baal, and to Jehovah; the way the king of Babylon changed the names of Daniel and his three young companions. It so seems that Ahab, while submitting to the counsel of his wicked wife, and walking in her way, was not completely comfortable with her actions and behavior.

and felt some remorse in the depth of his heart. He did not, therefore, commit his faithful servant to partake of his worship of Baal; and did not discuss it even with his wife, lest he would put him in danger. On another aspect, he probably felt the need for a faithful steward to support him.

*“For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord,
that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets
and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and
water” (4)*

Why did Jezebel massacred and killed the prophets of the Lord?

- 1- She intended to shut up every mouth that utters the divine truth.

- 2- Feeling the helplessness of her gods to bring the rain back to the earth, when Elijah had that authority, she intended to cover up that weakness by practicing her own authority to massacre and kill the prophets of the Lord.
- 3- Claiming publicly that they were the cause for the draught, they have to be killed to give pleasure to the gods, and to bring the rain back on earth.
- 4- Because Elijah slipped away from her hand, she avenged him by killing those prophets.

Those prophets, most probably students in the school of prophets, kept and fed by Obadiah in two caves, were praying for the sake of the people. While many of the people had nothing to eat or water to drink because of the famine, God sustained them through Obadiah, who was in charge of the king's house: And as the psalmist says: *"Oh! How great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You; which You have prepared for those who trust in You, in the presence of the sons of men"* (Psalm 31: 19); *"Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him"* (Psalm 33: 18); *"He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant"* (Psalm 111: 5).

- + *"God gives food to those who fear Him"* Psalm 111: 5); food that would never get corrupted; *"The bread that comes down from heaven"* (John 6: 27, 51); He gives it, not because we are worthy; *"For Christ died for the ungodly"* (Romans 5: 6); No one gives such food, except the Merciful and the Compassionate Lord.

"And Ahab had said to Obadiah, 'Go into the land, to all the springs of water, and to all the brooks; perhaps we will find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so that we will not have to kill any livestock' .

So they divided the land between them to explore it. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

Now, as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him, and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, 'Is that you, my Lord Elijah?'. And he answered him, 'It is I. go tell your master, Elijah is here'" (5-8)

This encounter was not by chance, but by a divine ordinance. God who commanded Elijah to go and present himself to Ahab, is the One who sent Obadiah to encounter with Elijah; and opened up his eyes to recognize Elijah.. Obadiah who had shown compassion toward the prophets of the Lord, and fed them, Now, with the spirit of humble sonhood falls on his face before his spiritual father, the prophet Elijah.

He called him *"My Lord Elijah"*, but Elijah who seeks neither titles nor honor, said to him: *"Tell your master, 'Elijah is here' (8)*

"Then he said, 'How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab to kill me?" (9)

Knowing how extensively Ahab tried to search for Elijah, even in the surrounding nations; Perceiving that the king's heart would never change, to return to the living God, and is not be worthy to encounter the prophet Elijah; And knowing that the Spirit of the Lord moves Elijah from one place to another; and may carry him away from that evil king to a far country; and the king would, therefore, surely kill him for not putting Elijah under arrest to bring him over to him, Obadiah begged to be relieved of that assignment, which would probably cost him his life.

"As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, 'He is not here', he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you" (10)

Ahab very seriously searched for Elijah, not only within Israel, but in the surrounding nations; not to present repentance and to return to the Lord, but to apply pressure on him to seek the return of rain, to put an end to the famine.

“And now you say, ‘Go, tell your master: Elijah is here’. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I have gone from you, that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I, your servant have feared the Lord from my youth. Was it not reported to my Lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the lord’s prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now you say, ‘ go, and tell your master: Elijah is here’; And he will kill me. Then Elijah said, ‘As the Lord of hosts live, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah” (11-16)

3- ELIJAH ENCOUNTERS AHAB:

Ahab sent Obadiah to search for water; And now Obadiah came back to tell him that he found Elijah, by whose prayer he carries the keys of heaven to stop the rain, or to let it fall.

“Then it happened when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, ‘Is that you, O troubler of Israel?’ (17)

And he answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandment of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals” (18)

Ahab did not stretch his hand toward the prophet, for fear of what happened to Jeroboam, when he stretched his hand toward the prophet, and it got paralyzed. Yet he accused him of being the troubler of Israel, to which Elijah courageously and strongly reversed it against the king and his father's house. Elijah was not like Achan the son of Carmi (Joshua 7), the troubler of Israel, but it was Ahab and his father's house who were.

When Joshua proclaimed that Achan the son of Carmi was the troubler of Israel, "*all Israel stoned him, and they burned them with fire*" (Joshua 7: 25). Ahab wished he could do the same with Elijah, to have him stoned by the people, like Achan..

- + Indeed, "*The righteous is as bold as a lion*" (Proverb 28: 1). Elijah stood before the king, as a lion stands before a bleeding unclean dog; although one of them was clothed in purple and the other was clothed in sheep skin. Which of the two was more honorable? The purple brought the famine forth, while the sheep skin granted relief from that calamity; divided the River Jordan, and let a double portion of Elijah's spirit be upon Elisha.

How great are the honors given to the saints! Not only their words, but even their modest attires are honored by all creation.

The sheep skin of Elijah divided the river Jordan;

The sandals of the three young men treaded upon the fire;

The word of Elisha changed the nature of water, to let the iron tool float on its surface;

The rod of Moses divided the Red Sea, and brought water forth from the rock;

The garments of the apostle Paul healed the sick;

The shadow of the apostle Peter raised from the dead; and

The remains of the saints drive the unclean spirits away.

The saints do everything by authority. Elijah did not see in Ahab, a king with a crown or purple attire, but saw a soul clothed in filthy rags,. saw him a captive and a slave of his evil desires, and despised his authority; and saw him like someone playing the part of a king on stage, and not a genuine king ... What would be the benefit of the outer riches when the inner poverty is great? ... And what would be the harm of the outer poverty when the treasure of richness is inside? ... The apostle Paul was a lion when he entered the prison; and when he raised his voice in prayer, the foundation of the prison was shaken.

“Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the 450 prophets of Baal, and the 400 prophets of Ashera, who eat at Jezebel’s table” (19)

Mount Carmel: is a chain of flat plateaus on the top of a mountain, some of which are 1800 feet high above sea level; and extends 13 miles westward to the Mediterranean Sea, going steeply down close to the city of ‘Haifa’. There was an ancient broken down altar (30), probably going back to the time of the great patriarchs; and at the far North-West reaches of the Mount, there is a monastery of the Carmelites by the name of the prophet Elijah.

The prophet Elijah chose that location on account of that the Canaanites believed that Mount Carmel is the dwelling place of gods. It is as though he intended to set the battle between the living God and the heathen gods at their stronghold; And on another aspect to give the arrogant queen the chance to watch the battle from her own palace in Jezreel.

He, who cannot climb Mount Carmel, can watch from afar the fire come down from heaven; and all can see the cloud coming from the sea; Namely, no one can deceive the people in any way.

On the highest point of Mount Carmel, on its eastern side, there is the ruins of the altar of burnt offering; a rocky plateau of 1635 feet elevation above sea level; with dense trees, that is wide enough to accommodate thousands of people to watch and follow that event.

The king used to worship the Baal (the male god); with 450 prophet ministering to him; Whereas the queen used to worship Ashtoreth, for which she built ashera, with 400 prophets ministering to it. Those 450 prophets and priests were those who resided in the royal palace, out of all the prophets of Baal in Israel.

The priests of Baal were called prophets on account of that they claimed to prophesy and to know the future.

“So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel” (20)

By “all the children of Israel” he means the heads of the tribes and families , and the leaders of the people.

Why did the king give his consent to Elijah’s request with no hesitation?

On one aspect, the circumstances were very urgent, because of the severe famine that dwelt upon the country; And on another aspect, the king did not foresee what was to happen; but assumed that Elijah would only bless the land and pray for the rain to come down, before the people and the priests of Baal, as a show of power and authority.

4- ELIJAH ENCOUNTERS THE PEOPLE:

“And Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him’. But the people answered him not a word” (21)

It was the desire of the people to combine the two worships together, of the living God and the Baal. Having got in touch with God, with His power and love, and heard about what He has done with their fathers; And having, in the worship of Baal, enjoyed all their needs of pleasure and abominations, they assumed that they would be able to mix between the two worships, and to divide their hearts between the two gods.

Having been taught to believe that Baal had the authority over rain and fire, the prophet Elijah intended to demonstrate to them otherwise.

The literal translation came as: "How long will you jump between two branches?"; a symbolic analogy to a bird jumping from one branch of a tree to another; not knowing where to settle down.

Yet the living God would never accept less than the whole heart; as according to the prophet Hosea: *"Their heart is divided. Now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars; He will ruin their sacred pillars"* (Hosea 10: 2); And Joshua the son of Nun says: *"If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Joshua 24: 15).

If God would not accept less than the whole heart, On His side, He desires to give us Himself; to let us enjoy the Grantor of gifts, in whom our satisfaction is realized; and without whom our depths would never be satisfied.

- + There is nothing He could present to you better than Himself; But if you, on the other hand, happen to find anything better, go ahead and seek it in any possible way.
- + God has no better reward to grant us, than Himself.
- + Make us happy, O God, in being preoccupied with You; and not losing You.

(St. Augustine)

The seventh Council of Cartage led by Cyprian the martyr, dealing with the issue of 'The baptism of the heretics' (Pelagianus of Luperciana); applied the phrase, saying, "*whether the Lord is God or the Baal*"; to 'Whether the Church or heresy is the true Church', And said, 'If heresy is not the true Church, how could there be baptism among the heretics?!'.

"Then Elijah said to the people, 'I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Therefore let them give us two bulls, and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it'" (22, 23)

5- ELIJAH ENCOUNTERS THE PRIESTS OF BAAL:

The preparation of the sacrifice requested by Elijah came according to the Mosaic law (Leviticus 1). But being aware of the probable deception of the devil and his followers, he was particular against putting fire on the altar.

"Then you call on the names of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God. So all the people answered and said, 'It is well spoken'" (24)

"The God who answers by fire, He is God". As Baal was Apollo, the god of fire, believed by his followers to have authority over fire, and to him thunder, lightning, and rain belong, Elijah intended to present his case through what the Baal-worshippers believed. And on another aspect, the true God, to confirm receiving the sacrifice, would send fire from heaven to consume it (Leviticus 9: 24; Judges 6: 21).

In the old, Isaac asked his father Abraham, *“The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”*; to which his father answered, *“God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son”* (Genesis 22: 7). Now, here is the altar, the wood, and the burnt offering, but where is the fire? ... God will provide the fire for the burnt offering.

It is befitting of us to seek from God to send His fiery Holy Spirit, to sanctify the altar of our hearts, and to receive our offerings, and to proclaim His pleasure in us’

*“Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, ‘Choose one bull for yourselves, and prepare it first, for you are many;
and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it. So they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, ‘O Baal, hear us’. But there was no voice, no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they had made”* (25, 26)

The prophets of Baal used every way to provoke their god to move, they called his name, screamed, by danced around him, in an attempt to please him, and they even cut their own bodies with knives and lances.

“And so it was, at noon that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god, either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping, and must be awakened” (27)

Unless Elijah felt that he is guarded by the divine care, he would not dare to mock such a great number of priests of Baal, supported by the king and the queen, and followed by all the people, while he was alone by himself.

“So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them” (28)

Certain heathen customs still prevail among primitive tribes, entailing violent dancing, and wounding their bodies, which is forbidden by the divine law (Deuteronomy 14: 1). About the worship of the Hindu goddess ‘Matha’ it came that about 10,000 to 12,000 persons gather together; then someone appears in their midst. Pretending that the goddess entered into him, he takes off his turban, releases his long hair over his face, then starts to jump around, shakes his body, howls loud screams, strikes himself with a chain and cuts his body with a sword, then put his blood on the foreheads of his audience; who, feeling as though the spirit of the goddess had entered into them as well, start to dance and jump around all night long.

“And it was so, when midday was past that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice.

But there was no voice, and no one answered, no one paid attention”. Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me’. So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down”
(29, 30)

The altar was probably previously broken down by a command from Ahab or Jezebel, in an attempt to hinder the worship of the living God.

“And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the

Lord had come, saying, 'Israel shall be your name'" (31)

By repairing the altar with twelve stones according to the number of the tribes, Elijah proclaimed his utter rejection of the division of the kingdom; confirming that the Lord is God of all the tribes, and that His pleasure is in presenting one burnt offering on behalf of all.

Choosing twelve stones was not without meaning. For the figure 12, according to St. Augustine, refers to the kingdom of God on earth; where the Holy Trinity reigns (3) on the (4) corners of the world; namely, the East, the West, the North, and the South: So the total of $3 \times 4 = 12$. The figure 12 then refers to the Church of God stretching from one corner of the earth to the other corner. The following are examples of its use:

- The old people of God embraced 12 tribes, referring to the sacred Church (Genesis 35: 22).
- The high priest used to bear on his breast plate 12 precious stones; as the true believer intercedes for all believers; and to fix on his garment 12 bells, as a reference to his commitment of the living testimony, wherever he goes (Exodus 28).
- Moses set 12 pillars at the foot of the mountain (Exodus 24: 4); and Joshua set 12 stones in the River Jordan (Joshua 4: 3).
- The Lord Christ chose 12 disciples.
- The Higher Jerusalem has 12 gates, three on each of its four sides (Revelation 21).

"Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed (a seah equals three gallons). And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and

laid it on the wood, and said, 'Fill four water pots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood'" (33)

"For God is not the author of of confusion, but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14: 33), he demands from His children to follow suit. So did Elijah by putting the wood in order on the altar.

'Calment' quoted an old text he referred to St. John Chrysostom, in which he said that he saw underneath the base of a heathen altar, little gaps, from which tubes go up to its top. The priest secretly set fire in the gaps underground, which would move up through the tubes to ignite the wood on the altar; to give a false impression to the simple worshippers that fire miraculously came and consumed the sacrifice. That is why the prophet Elijah insisted on pouring water enough to fill the trenches all around the altar, to give no chance to any doubt that the fire that comes down to consume the sacrifice is from the Lord.

"Then he said, 'Do it a second time'; and they did it a second time; And he said, 'Do it a third time', and they did it a third time; So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water" (34, 35)

As the fresh water was very scarce at the time, because of the draught, they brought the water from the sea nearby,.

"And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word" (36)

The prophet Elijah did not seek his own glory, but the glory of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

“Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again (37).

Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench” (38)

The fire did not come from underneath the altar, the way the heathen priests used to do to deceive the simple worshippers, but fell from above, and started by consuming the sacrifice, then the wood underneath it, then the stones and the dust; and it finally licked the water that was in the trench. Contrary to its nature, the fire fell from above and did not come up from below; as normally, the fire always starts from below, then the flames spreads up; but here it started from above then its flames went gradually down. The fire consumed the sacrifice first before spreading to the wood below; for all to perceive that it is a fire coming from above; and that the sacrifice was not consumed by the burning wood.

Consumption of the sacrifice is a sign of God’s acceptance, and of His pleasure of an offering presented from a pure heart.

By burning the wood: refers to God’s intention to leave no work in us that could be consumed by fire, according to the words, *“Now, if anyone builds on this foundation, with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw; each one’s work will become manifest, for the day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is”* (1 Corinthians 3: 12, 13).

By burning the stones: God intends for all His people (12 stones) to be a sacrifice of love for Him; the way He presents Himself a sacrifice of love for redeeming them.

By burning the dust: God intends to take away our dust from us, to set His heavens instead.

By licking the water in the trench: God seeks hearts that are not covered by the water of this world, but enflamed by the fire of the Spirit.

- + He ordered them to bring a plenty of water and to pour it three times on the wood. Then, by his prayer he ignited fire from the water, contrary to the nature of both elements; to demonstrate the supernatural might of God. Here, by such an amazing sacrifice, Elijah clearly proclaimed the sacramental rite of baptism to be instituted later on..

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

- + The Lord Jesus is both, like fire that enflamed the hearts of those who listened to Him; and like a fountain of water that gave them coolness; having, Himself said in His gospel: *"I have come to send fire on earth"* (Luke 12: 40); and, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink"* (John 7: 37).

(St. Ambrose)

6- KILLING THE PRIESTS OF BAAL:

"Now, when all the people saw it they fell on their faces, and they said, 'The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God'

*And Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape! So they seized them, and
Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there" (39, 40)*

When the people confessed that the Lord is God, Elijah demanded from them to proclaim their rejection of idol-worship by following the law through killing the idol-worshippers and their provokers (Deuteronomy 13: 1-11; 2-3; 13: 3); He demanded the execution of the priests of Baal, to put an end to their deception of the simple people.

The Brook Kishon starts on Mount Tabor and flows down to the Mediterranean Sea. He probably chose that location to execute the prophets of Baal, that when the dense rain expected to come fill the brook, it would carry their corpses to the sea.

"Then Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of abundance of rain" (41)

It so seems that Ahab fasted all day long; So Elijah sent him to his palace to eat and drink; for God's pleasure will surely dwell on the earth, after the people testified to their God, and executed the prophets of Baal. It is obvious from what Elijah said that Ahab was content with what the people did, of killing the prophets of Baal.

The king spent the whole day watching what is going on. By fasting, he probably sought from God to intervene, or he was too excited to eat or drink.

Although Elijah saw no sign of any rain, yet by the spirit of prophecy, he said to the king, *'There is the sound of abundance of rain" (41)*; the time of draught is over.

&- ELIJAH'S REQUEST FOR RAIN:

"So Ahab went up to eat and drink; and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees" (42)

The prophet Elijah retreated to the top of the Carmel, to a certain very high location, where he could hide; As according to Amos: *"And though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, From there I will search and take them"* (Amos 9: 3). There he went alone, accompanied only by his servant; for it was befitting of him, after encountering with the whole people, the king, and the leaderships, to hide for some time to encounter quietly with his God, to say, together with the prophet Habakkuk: *"I will stand my watch, and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me"* (Habakkuk 2: 1).

The prophet Elijah did not preoccupy himself with what took place as something that glorified him or granted him a conquest; but set forth to seek from God to realize His promise and to grant rain to the earth. While requesting from the king to go eat and drink, he set forth to pray; for the men of God seek comfort for the others, when they themselves practice strife.

The prophet bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, as a sign of contrition.

"And said to his servant, 'Go up now, look toward the sea'. So he went up and looked, and said, 'There is nothing'; and seven times he said, 'Go again'. Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, 'there is a cloud as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea'. So he said, 'Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down before

the rain stops you” (43. 44)

I wish we do not despise the divine gifts that may seem as small as a man's hand;
For he who give thanks for the few will enjoy the abundance.

The small cloud seen by Elijah coming out of the sea, refers to the incarnation of God the Word; who became like a small cloud that hides the glory of his divinity, coming to our world to flow over us the water of the holy Spirit; to turn the poverty of our heart into a fruitful paradise.

“Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain.

So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. Then the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel” (45, 46)

The king set forth with his chariot, while the prophet girded up his loins and ran ahead of the king before he reach his palace; he raced the chariots and horses and prevailed; and on him the saying, *“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?”*, did not apply..

He did not set forth to rebuke him, nor to wound him with a word, but to support and strengthen him before he confront his wicked wife Jezebel, who, misusing his weakness, made out of him an evil idol-worshipper. He intended to confirm to him that he does not oppose him personally, nor bear hatred toward him, but longs to support him to minister to the Lord; and that he is faithful to him as long as he is in the Lord.

He ran for about 16 miles to reach the entrance of Jezreel, to demonstrate his continuous readiness to serve.

Jezreel is located at Mount Galboah. Ahab did not move the capital from Samaria (1 kings 22: 10, 37); but built a palace for himself in Jezreel (1 kings 22: 10); where he used as a winter resort for himself and queen Jezebel. An Assyrian inscription was recently discovered describing Ahab as 'Ahab of Jezreel'.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS !8

O LORD, YOU, AND NO ONE ELSE, ARE MY GOD

- + The voice of Elijah Your prophet rings in my ears;
"If the Lord is God, follow Him; And if Baal, then follow him"
"How long will you falter between two opinions?"
- + How long shall I set inside myself the calf and Ashtoreth?!
How long shall I reject Your kingdom, setting up for myself violent masters
who destroy my depths?
- + In my foolishness I set up in myself an altar of Baal;
And I came to have priests and priestesses to offer my life a sacrifice to
him;
They turned my life into servitude;
I came to be a slave of riches, honor, and temporal covetousness;
Who will set me free from such a humiliation?
- + Let Your fiery Spirit fill my being;
Let Him turn my depths into a heavenly flame of fire;
Let Him leave in them no trace of dust;
Let Him turn my earth into heaven;

Let Him leave no trace of stones; but let Him instead set children of Abraham;

As a son of Abraham, My heart will never be stony anymore, but will be gentle;;

Let Him lick all water in the trenches of my heart;

So that no spiritual coolness would have a place in my heart.

+ Grant me a double portion of Elijah's spirit , as You did with Elisha his disciple;

To come to have the fiery heart;

To kill in me every priest of Baal or Ashtoreth;.

To make out of my heart a Golgotha, that bears the sacrifice of the true cross.

Yes, reign by the fire of Your Holy Spirit in my depths.

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CHAPTER 19

GOD APPEARS TO ELIJAH

God sometimes allowed for Elijah to pass through affliction, for the sake of the edification of his soul, lest his continuous success and conquests might lead him to pride. In the last chapter, God granted him conquest upon the prophets of Baal, which made the people testify to the living God, and reject Baal. And it so seems that the king himself was not offended by the execution of the priests of Baal. Now, in the present chapter, Elijah's soul got depressed by the oppression of queen Jezebel against him. But God came to his support: He sent him an angel, appeared to him, and brought joy to his heart by choosing a prophet to be his disciple, and to consummate his mission.

1- Elijah escapes to Beersheba	1 - 3
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1- ELIJAH ESCAPES TO BEERSHEBA:

"Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword" (1)

As a priestess of Baal, Jezebel considered herself a stronghold to his priests. Now hearing how the people revolted and rejected his worship, and how Elijah executed the priests, she found herself in a very awkward position. Ahab did not

dare in his talk to her to refer to the name of the living God, nor to what He had done, but only *“to what Elijah had done”*.

“Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time” (2)

Probably feeling helpless to kill Elijah, before that public revolt against Baal; Or feeling some change in the way her husband talked to her, and that he started to take the side of the prophet, Jezebel sent to Elijah to threaten him, to provoke him to escape, to get rid of him.

She probably feared that the people, having seen how Elijah, by his prayer, brought down fire from heaven, and brought the rain back, might ask him to become their spiritual leader, and the law-maker of the kingdom.

“And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there” (3)

Elijah escaped from the evil of Jezebel; and after him, Jeremiah longed to escape from his people, if he find a resort for himself in the wilderness (Jeremiah 9: 2).

According to some, Elijah did not escape for fear from Jezebel and her evil, as much as for the sake of his life with the Lord; He went a day's journey into the wilderness, and prayed that he might die. He felt the need for a divine help; because of the violent resistance against the worship of God.

In Beersheba he left his servant, for he intended to enter into the wilderness to be alone with God, to enjoy meditating in Him, encountering and debating with Him; And God gave him his heart desire. He did the way Abraham left his servant

with the donkey, and set forth with his son Isaac to the mountain to worship God, and to offer the sacrifice; And the way the Lord Christ did, in Gethsemane, when he left His disciples and went alone to talk to the Father, before drinking the cup of passion on behalf of all humanity.

Elijah escaped from the northern to the southern kingdom, where the good king Jehoshaphat reigned, and set forth to the far to Beersheba in the far south. What an amazing thing to do! ... Elijah who did not fear to confront 850 priests of Baal, beside the king, and the whole people, trusting in God's care for him; Now fears the threat of an arrogant woman!. They are moments of weakness lived by the daring prophet.

Elijah escaped from Jezebel, whose name means (an abundance of vanity); he escaped to Mount 'Horeb'.

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers" (4)

He felt that he was no more able to offer something good to his people; for he has offered all he had. He was passing through a period of bitterness, for things were going in a way contrary to what he hoped for. He wished for the return of the king and his people to God; and feeling that he could not achieve that, he counted himself of no more value; and that he is no better than his fathers, who oftentimes failed to draw the people to God.

He expected that, after the fire came down from heaven; and the people publicly testified to the true faith, to see things go in the right direction; but he found out that the king submitted to the queen; and that the people might probably return to idol-worship, under the royal seduction and pressure.

He walked in the wilderness in the direction of Horeb; went a day's journey south of Judah, to Beersheba, about 90 miles far from Jezreel, on the border of the desert of (maze); He could not reach it before the end of the next day, walking day and night, with no rest on the way. Beersheba is a city within the portion of the tribe of Simon (Joshua 19: 2); for a part of that tribe joined Judah.

Although Elijah escaped to Beersheba from the face of the evil Jezebel who sought his death, yet he wished to die by the Lord's hand, and not by the hand of that woman; for falling into the hands of the merciful God is far better than falling into the hands of an evil man.

He wished to die in the wilderness, in a holy land, and not in a land defiled by idol-worship. When even the prophets felt some kind of failure, they wished for death; something that many of them did, like the prophets Moses and Jonah.

- + I am truly striving here, feeling as though You have forgotten me; although I know for sure that You are just testing me. For even though You seem to have forsaken me, yet You will not fail to grant me what You have promised. Nevertheless, not being able to endure, I say to You: 'Why have You forgotten me?'.

(St. Augustine)

- + We are not satisfied with how we are now; for even the things we desire cause us trouble; and what we long to get, we no longer desire when we get it; That is why, it was not without cause, the saints cried, as long as they were here on earth. David wailed (Psalm 120: 5),, and Jeremiah lamented (Jeremiah 1: 18); and Elijah moaned.

If we believe the wise, and those in whom the divine Spirit dwelt, they were perpetually hastening toward the better (to set forth toward the eternal life and the resurrection).

(St. Ambrose)

According to St. Ambrose, the wilderness to which we escape is the repentance or God's grace, where the fugitive finds refuge and salvation.

- + Repentance is a good escape;
God's grace is a good escape; where the fugitive finds his salvation;
The wilderness is a good escape, to it escaped Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist (Matthew 3: 1; Luke 13: 2).

Elijah escaped from the woman Jezebel, whose name means (an abundance of vanity); he escaped to Mount 'Horeb' (8), meaning (dryness), where the flow of carnal vain waters dry; to come to a more perfect knowledge of God. When he was by the Brook of Cherith, meaning (knowledge), he could drink of the abundant running water of knowledge of God (17: 5). Escaping from the world, Elijah did not even seek the food needed by his body, beside that provided to him by the ministering ravens (17: 6). His food was most probably out of this world; having walked forty days in the strength of the meal he got (8).

His escape, surely, was not from a mere woman, but from this world; He did not fear death, for he asked for it from the Lord, saying: "*Take my life*" (4).

He escaped from the seductions of this world, from the venom of evil behavior, from the lowly works of the sinning, unholy generation.

(St. Ambrose)

2- AN ANGEL SUPPORTS ELIJAH:

Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Arise and eat'”(5)

With his unceasing walk from Mount Carmel to Beersheba, followed by a day's journey in the wilderness toward Horeb, he was completely exhausted, and slept. Being in need of a divine help to support his tired soul because of feeling failure, and his tired and hungry body, God sent to him an angel to provide him with the necessities.

Elijah desired to sleep and never to awake, for Jezebel had destroyed his soul; but he was awakened by a touch of the angel, to perceive that he is the object of God's care; and should not, therefore, get disturbed. Elijah was unique in being cared for by God. While he was living in normal circumstances in villages or cities, he used to prepare his own food like everyone else; but while under special circumstances, God sent him a raven, and a widow, And where there were no ravens nor men, God sent to him an angel to sustain him.

“Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again” (6)

Elijah used to sustain himself with the food of a hermit, which he had to provide for himself; but when he had to escape and hide by the Brook of Cherith by the Jordan, after proclaiming that there would be no rain except at his word, God sent to him a raven to provide him with bread and meat every morning and evening; And when the River Jordan dried up, God sent him to the widow of Zarephath to sustain him with just bread; And finally, having sent him to Mount

Horeb, to speak to him face to face (1 kings 19), an angel provided him one cake and a jar of water to eat and drink, then to fast forty days and forty nights, in a supernatural way.

- + The Holy Book tells us that Elijah who escaped from the face of the wicked Jezebel, sat first under the broom tree, where he got strength and food. That means that whoever escapes from the seductions of covetousness, and from a (wicked) woman, namely, from evil pleasure, will find a refuge and shade under the tree of chastity, where he enjoys the coming of Christ, the Head of virgins.

(Father Methouseus)

- + If God so wills, could He not provide His servant prophet with excellent wine, and delicious meat? When Elisha invited the sons of the prophets, he offered them only herbs to eat; and as they ate, and cried out, saying, *“O man of God, there is death in the pot”* (2 kings 4: 40), Elisha, by a spiritual power, put something in the pot that turned the bitterness of the food into sweetness; the way Moses did with the water of Marah (Exodus 15: 25).

Again, when men were sent to put Elisha under arrest, and God struck them by physical and mental blindness, according to the prayer of Elisha, to bring them to Samaria; he demanded from the king to give them “bread and water” to eat and drink, before sending them back to their master (3 kings 6: 22). And Daniel, who could eat delicacies from the king’s table, preferred to eat only vegetables.

(St. Jerome)

- + Elijah, trained by God on the perfection of virtue, *“looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water”;“And he went on the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb”* (6, 8). Our fathers, crossing the sea on foot (Exodus 17: 6), drank water, and not wine. Daniel and the three Hebrew young men, ate vegetable and drank water (Daniel 1: 8); by which the first prevailed upon the wild nature of lions, and the others found in the fire a cool refuge, and their feet were not harmed.(Daniel 3: 27).And John the Baptist, the master of hermits appeared on earth like an angel.

Let us now speak about women. ‘Judith’ did not desire the delicacies of the table of ‘Holofernes’; and by her chastity alone, she got conquest, that men failed to get, saved her city from siege, and killed the leader of the enemies by her own hands (Judith 8). Esther, by her fasting moved the arrogant king (Esther 4: 16).And Hannah, who served God in her widowhood 84 years, with fasting and prayers, day and night in the temple, was worthy of seeing the infant Jesus (Luke 2: 27).

(St. Ambrose)

- + Escaping from the threats of Jezebel, Elijah, by the strength of a single meal of a cake and some water, he found by his head when he was awakened by an angel; went forty days and forty nights on an empty stomach and dry mouth, as far as Horeb the mountain of God. , where he dwelt in a cave as though in a hotel. ... What an amazing encounter he had with God! *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”* ... That is surely the blessing of the fasting, or let us say, of eating within limits, that creates a kind of friendship between God and man; to be *“overshadowed by a cloud”*, as he, together with Moses encountered the transfigured Lord Christ (Mathew 17: 4). ... It is truly a friendship! For if the everlasting God

would never feel hungry, as testified by Isaiah (40: 28), there will be time when man will liken God, and will live without food.

(The scholar Tertullian)

It came in the gospel referred to James (Protoevangelium of James), about Joaquim, father of St. Mary, that being sad because he was childless, he went to the mountain and fasted forty days and forty nights, saying to himself, 'I shall not eat nor drink until the Lord my God looks down at me; my prayer shall be my only food and drink.

"And the angel of the Lord came back the second time and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you" (7)

The distance between Beersheba and Horeb is about 150 miles. The angel did not tell him where he is going, but only that the journey is too great for him.

"So he arose, ate, and drank, and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God" (8)

He was led by the Spirit to Mount Horeb, where the prophet Moses received the law of God. How amazing was God's plan concerning Elijah: He commanded the ravens to provide him with bread and meat twice a day; then blessed the flour and the oil of the widow, to sustain him two years without tasting meat; and now, as the angel provided him with a single cake and a jar of water, he stayed in their strength forty days and forty nights without food or drink; he fasted forty days like the prophet Moses.

- + Both Moses and Elijah fasted forty days and forty nights, living on God alone. . From the old, the principle, saying, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord*" (Deuteronomy 8: 3; Matthew 4: 4) was sanctified. Here, we see a faint portrait of our strength in the future (in heaven).

(The scholar Tertullian)

Speaking about the forty days fast by Moses and Elijah, the scholar Tertullian referred to the danger of greed and the lack of control on the stomach, by quoting the verses: "*The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play*" (1 Corinthians 10: 7; Exodus 32: 6), "*Jechurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat and grew thick; you are covered with fat; then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the rock of his salvation*" (Deuteronomy 32: 15); and, "*Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses, and dwell in them, ... when your heart is lifted up, and you forgot the Lord your God ...*" (Deuteronomy 8: 12-14).

The distance between Beersheba and Horeb could be covered in just a week; yet God allowed for Elijah to walk forty days and forty nights; the way He did with the children of Israel in the wilderness.

The mountain where God encountered Moses, is called "*the mountain of God*"; and the house where God encounters His people, "*the house of God*"; and the city where His temple was built, "*the city of God*".

Elijah entered the cave; most probably that into which Moses had previously entered, when he desired to behold the glory of God; God passed by him, and he saw God's glory, only from the back (Exodus 33: 22).

Elijah wished to escape, and even to die, because of what Jezebel had done of destruction to the faith; but the Lord granted Elijah what never entered into his heart; He brought him forth to His holy mountain, and let him enter into the cave, to have an open conversation with him; God brought him to that location, to let him say together with Nehemiah: *"Should such a man as I flee?!"* (Nehemiah 6: 11).

"What are you doing here Elijah?". It is not a time for meditation, but for work; ... why are you here? The people are waiting for you; ... You are responsible for ministry; Do not flee!.

3- THE LORD APPEARS TO ELIJAH:

"And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and said to him, 'What are you doing here Elijah?'" (9)

- + After preparing him by fasting for forty days, Elijah saw the Lord on Mount Horeb, and heard from Him the words, *"What are you doing here Elijah?"*; which sound almost similar to His saying to Adam in the old, "Adam, Where are you?" in the book of Genesis. The later saying was addressed to someone who ate and was lost; whereas the former is addressed to a fasting servant, with compassion and love.

(St. Jerome)

"So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life'" (10)

He responded to the question of the Lord, by saying that he has been very zealous for the glory of the Lord God of hosts; but he is broken down by despair, for seeing no one faithfully worship the Lord other than himself. He counted all the years of his ministry as nothing, as they did not give fruit to a single person. He did not complain against the king, nor against the queen alone, but against all Israel; accusing them of the following:

- They have forsaken the covenant of the Lord, although they practiced the outer sign of the covenant, namely, the circumcision.
- They have forsaken the worship of, and the ministry to the Lord.
- They persecuted His ministers and prophets
- They, not only deserted the altars of the Lord, but they tore them down. Those altars which were built by good men, not able to go to Jerusalem, and refusing to worship the two golden calves, not the Baal. Although those altars destroy the unity of the holy congregation, yet they were built by good men, with the intention not to be completely denied of offering sacrifices to the living God; they built them out of their love for God, and of their desire to proclaim His glory.

In response to the Lord's question, about why he came to the wilderness, and lived in the cave; he said:

- + *"I alone am left"*. He is no longer able to appear nor to fulfill any goal. Although all the people cried out *"The Lord, He is God"*, none of them stood by him, nor came to his defense. Elijah forgot that he is not alone, for God is with him; even if the whole world were against him.
- + He is no longer able to appear for the sake of his safety; as his life became in danger; *"They seek to take my life"*.

- + No Christian could say that he is without troubles. ... Why? For as long as we are still in the body, we are in a journey toward God. However good, things are, we are still away from our home. No one could love travel and love his home at the same time. For whoever loves his home, his journey would seem tough and troublesome. Here we labor and grieve; but there, we shall find comfort with no limit, and love with no anxiety.

(St. Augustine)

"Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake'" (11)

Here, God deals with Elijah in the same way He dealt with Moses. Elijah stood at the same spot where Moses stood, when God proclaimed Himself to him, when he received the law (Exodus 19: 9, 6).

The Lord passed by Elijah like a great and strong wind that tore into the mountains and broke the rocks; by an earthquake and by fire; yet God did not proclaim Himself by all those manifestations, that only prepared the way for Elijah to hear the Lord amid the stillness and quietness. That what exactly happened to Moses in his encounter with God.

God intends to encounter with His believers through a quiet and peaceful atmosphere, and not through the violent manifestations of nature.

According to the Chaldeans, God appeared to Elijah, preceded by a procession of angels, like a strong wind that tore into the mountain and broke the rocks before the Lord. God was not in the midst of that horrifying angelic procession, which was followed by another hosts of noisy angels; and yet God's greatness was not in the midst of that noise; Those were followed by a third procession of fiery angels; and God's greatness was still not among them. Then those were followed by a gentle and peaceful singing sound. All that could probably give a symbolic portrait to present the role of God's care and grace.

The great and strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire, though all happen through God's pleasure, but they are not His nature; For God is a Spirit, who intends to transfigure more through quietness and tranquility. If Elijah, in his zeal, came to be like a strong and great wind; like an earthquake to destroy evil; or like a fire to consume every corruption and abomination, he is now called by God to work by him through quietness and tranquility. Elijah's zeal is holy, and the fire of his heart toward the glory of God is blessed; but it is now time for him, through the tranquility of his soul, to see the hidden work of God in the "knees that have not bowed to the Baal" (19: 18); and to set forth to anoint three persons for work:: the king of Aram, the king of Israel, and his disciple the prophet Elisha; for each of them to play a specific role, in integration to one another, to chastise Israel, particularly the house of Ahab.

Although it is good to have an enflaming holy zeal in us, but we are committed not to fall into despair when we see the whole world as though had lost faith. We are committed to encounter the Lord in quietness and tranquility, and to listen to His voice, showing us His secret exalted works in our souls; and calling us to the hidden positive work, for the others to partake, together with us, of the ministry of the heavenly kingdom; whether by the positive or negative work. In that amazing encounter between God and Elijah, we get in touch with the encounter between the Church and her God along the generations.

The Encounter between God and His creation in the Old Covenant, used to happen through the strong wind, the earthquakes, and the fire; namely, through touched works in the regular nature. For man, in his spiritual childhood, was in need for an exalted material work to shake his inner depths, as it happened when God provided His people with His law through the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai. But in the New Covenant, which is an extension and a consummation of the Old Covenant, God Himself appeared, the living Word of God, *“who will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets”* (Matthew 12: 19). He gave us His Spirit on the day of the Pentecost through the strong wind, the earthquake, and the tongues of fire, as a confirmation that we get what men of the Old Covenant have long desired; that Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord, who brings us forth into the divine presence, to lift us in quietness and tranquility up to heaven.

“And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice” (12)

“A sound of sheer silence” in the ‘Oxford New Bible’

According to St. Justin, Plato, wrongly quoting from verse 12., believed that God is present in the fire.

St. Irenaeus also used verse 12 to confirm that we see God – unseen to us face to face – through His works with us: [The prophets saw God through His ordinances and His secrets; as it was said to Elijah: *“Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, and behold ...”* (11)]

And according to St. Augustine, we see God through our brethren saying: [Although you cannot see God, but it is your right to see Him through your love for your neighbor; and looking at the source of this love, you can see God as much as you can].

The vision of God:

Talking to us about the possibility of seeing God, and the way we can enjoy it, the scholar Origen says:

- + God was seen by Abraham and by other saints, through the divine grace. God presented Himself to be seen by righteous men, who were worthy of seeing Him.

An angel may probably be beside us now while we talk; but we cannot see him because we are not worthy of seeing him. Our physical or inner eye may seek to have this vision; but unless the angel proclaims himself to him has this desire, he cannot see him.

This fact does not only concern the vision of God in this present time, but when we depart from this world. God and His angels will not appear to all men directly after their departure, but this vision will be granted to the pure heart, worthy of the vision of God.

He, whose heart is weighed down by the burden of sin, is not in same place with him, whose heart is pure; For the later will see God, while the former will not.

I assume that this was what happened when Christ was here on earth in flesh. For not all who looked at Him, saw God. Although Pilate and Herod looked at Him, yet they have not seen Him (as God).

Three men came to Abraham at noon; while only two came to Lot in the evening (Genesis 19: 1); For Abraham alone was able to receive the perfection of the splendor of God's light.

- + The vision of God is mental and spiritual, and not carnal. Hence the Savior cautiously used the befitting word, saying: “*No one knows the Father except the Son*” (Matthew 11: 27). He did not say ‘sees’, *but said “knows”*. Those who are granted the vision of God, are given “the spirit of knowledge”, and “the spirit of wisdom”; that, through the Spirit, they can see God (Isaiah 11: 2).
- + We can know God, not by the physical eye, but by the mental eye; by what is according to the image of God; receiving the virtue of knowing God through His divine care.
- + Now, even when we seem as though qualified to see God by our mind and our heart, yet we do not see Him as He is, but according to what He would be for us; through His care that carries us.

(The scholar Origen)

By love, we can recognize God:

- + It is befitting of us to perceive how much to be said about (this) love; and how much should be said about God; for God, Himself, is love. For as “*No one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*” (Matthew 11: 27) ... In the same way, on account of that He is called “love”; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, who alone knows what is in God, “*for what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him*” (1 Corinthians 2: 11); The Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth proceeding from the Father (John 15: 26) wanders and searches for the souls, worthy and capable of receiving the greatness of His love; namely, the greatness of God; for He desires to proclaim it to them.

(The scholar Origen)

“So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, ‘What are you doing here Elijah?’” (13)

Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle, for fear of looking at the glory of God, whose splendor his eyes cannot endure to look at. For the heavenly hosts cover their faces before God for the sake of the splendor of His glory (Isaiah 6: 2); Elijah probably was ashamed to look at God, having got in touch with His exalted might and works; and for feeling that he has failed in his ministry.

Elijah did not wrap his face before the strong wind, the earthquake, or the fire; but before the sound of sheer silence, he could not endure God’s gentleness, love and compassion.

The prophet Moses, as well, hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3: 6).

Covering the face was a sign of respect and reverence; as when a European takes off his hat when meeting someone.

When God repeated His question: *“What are you doing here Elijah?”*, Elijah presented the same answer, complaining against Israel for their apostasy from God, and forsaking faith. The divine reaction was calling on him to return and work; to anoint Hazael, a king over Aram; Jahu, a king over Israel; and Elisha, a prophet in his place. It is as though God is saying to him: ‘Why should you despair? Was it because I did not punish the wicked?’

“So he said, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken

Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life” (14)

- + A minister only gets to know the word of God when he exiles himself from this world; escapes from the body, from covetousness, and denies himself the company of men to remain alone; as the prophet Elijah says: *“I am left alone”*. Yet he was not alone, for Christ was with him. Christ Himself said, *“I am not alone, for the Father is with Me”* (John 16: 32).

(St. Ambrose)

If Elijah's soul was embittered by the evil that came upon Israel; To chastise Israel, God sends someone from outside (Syria); and someone from inside (Jahu); and someone to consummate the mission of Elijah (the prophet Elisha).

4- ANOINTMENT OF HAZAEL AND JAHU KINGS:

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria (Aram)” (15)

God commanded Elijah to go to the wilderness of Damascus, to take a way where few people go, so as not to encounter Jezebel or any of her followers who oppress him.

The wilderness of Damascus, probably north of the home city of the prophet, between Bashan and Damascus, known in the old by the name 'Gaulanitis or Iturea'.

He commanded him to anoint Hazael as a king over Aram; as though he is telling him: If the people had not learned their lesson through chastisement by famine and draught for as long as three and a half years; I am, anointing Hazael as a king over Aram, to chastise them by blood-shedding (2 kings 8: 12, 18); hoping that they may forsake idol-worship.

*"Also you shall anoint Jahu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel.
And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Mehola,
you shall anoint as prophet in your place" (16)*

"Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel" (See 2 king 9); the one who killed Jehoram in the vineyard of 'Naboth the Jezreelite'; and the wicked Jezebel, where the dogs ate her flesh.

"You shall anoint Elisha a prophet in your place".. There is no doubt that Elijah's heart was comforted when the Lord called him to anoint Elisha a prophet in his place; for the living minister rejoices in the extension of his ministry after his departure from this world.

Elisha the son of Shaphat, is actually the grandson of Shaphat, but was known as the son of Shaphat (2 kings 9: 20; 2 Chronicles 22: 7); probably because his father died while young, and was raised by his grandfather.

Abel Mehola, means (the pasture of dancing); in the northern part of the Valley of the Jordan.

God did not tell him when he should anoint those three persons, but left it to him to choose the proper time to do it.

"It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill" (17)

"Whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill". By the sword of the word of the Lord, which is sharper than a two-edged sword (Jeremiah 1: 10; 18: 7).

It was befitting of the prophet Elijah, with his heart of fire, not to hasten the punishment of the apostates; for in the proper time, and by the proper tools, *"the Lord, by the rod of His mouth, and the breath of His lips, shall slay the wicked"* (Isaiah 11: 4; 2 Thessalonians 2: 8; Hosea 6: 5).

"Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (18)

Beside the anointment of the three persons previously mentioned, the Lord revealed to Elijah his unseen success, proclaiming to him the existence of seven thousand knees that have not bowed to Baal, and have not kissed him with their mouth.

Kissing the idols by the mouth has been a common custom (Job 31: 27; Hosea 13: 20). According to St. Clement of Alexandria, in his seventh book of 'Stromata', gave a detailed description of the different ways by which that custom was practiced.

In a debate with the Jew Trevo, St. Justin uses this verse, saying: [As God did not release His anger for the sake of those seven thousand knees; when He issues a certain verdict, He puts it into effect; for He knows that every day, some of you become disciples of the name of Christ, forsake the wrong way; and

receive the gifts according to the worthiness of each; One receives the spirit of understanding; another the spirit of counsel; another the spirit of strength; another the spirit of healing; another the spirit of prophecy; another the spirit of teaching; and another the spirit of the fear of God]

The apostle Paul used this verse to confirm the presence of a few remnant, holy for the Lord among the Jews when they rejected the Lord Christ and His gospel (Romans 11: 4). In every generation there is a remnant holy for the Lord like those seven thousand who have not bowed their knees to Baal, nor kissed him with their mouth:

a- By saying: “*I have reserved*” (18), means that those remnant are the work of the Lord’s hands, who reserves for Himself a selected few

who dedicate their whole life and energies to the account of His kingdom.

b- There is no comparison between those seven thousand, and the millions of people who have fallen into idol-worship; But God knows the former by name, cherish them, and put His holy seal on their foreheads (Revelation 7: 4).

c- These believing and faithful remnant are hidden, not known except to God (Psalm 83: 3). The seen church is like a threshold floor in which people see the chaff while the wheat are hidden among them; Then the day will come when God reveals His believers. Now, we are not able to distinguish those who are truly holy among the living believers..

+ Among the seven thousand in Israel, whose knees had not bowed to Baal, only Elijah and Elisha performed miracles; Yet no one among them despised Obadiah, who feared the Lord, but did not perform any miracle.

(The laws of the apostles)

5- ELISHA’S DISCIPLESHIP TO ELIJAH:

“So he departed from there and found Elisha the son Shaphat who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him” (19)

In the old, the agricultural land was measured by the number of plows used to plow it. Elisha was, therefore, a rich man for possessing twelve plows, each worked by a pair of oxen, as was the custom in Egypt, Assyria, and Palestine; and still is in the villages of Egypt and West Asia. By his prompt acceptance of the prophetic work, Elisha proclaimed forsaking his riches and possessions.

“Passing by him” means that Elijah crossed the River Jordan to come to Elisha. Elijah did not feel jealousy that Elisha will take his place, but, on the contrary, he joyfully came to anoint him. He probably knew him before; and knew where to find him, for he instantly went to encounter him. He did not enter into a debate with him, nor presented to him a program of work or a plan of ministry. But, being sure that Elisha is God’s choice, he called him to ministry on the spot.

Throwing the mantle on him bears the sense of strong friendship; counting him as one with him having the same mantle.

It implies the concept of honoring him; the way the prophet Moses did with Joshua the son of Nun (Numbers 27: 20).

It refers to a transfer of the spirit of prophecy, strength, and authority to him.

It also bears the spirit of compassionate fatherhood toward him; for the father usually helps his child to put on his clothes

Up to this very day, the Coptic bishop and the senior priests help the newly anointed priest or deacon to put on his holy attire, directly after his anointment, which bears the sense of fatherhood of the bishop or the senior priest toward the newly anointed priest or deacon.

Some Coptic priests practice the same thing after baptizing a child, and anointing him with the Meron, to proclaim his fatherhood to him or her, And that the newly baptized has received the new birth, the general priesthood, and the royal attire.

“And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, ‘Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you’; and he said to him, ‘Go back again, for what have I done to you?’” (20)

As saying farewell to parents in the East would normally take days and weeks; Elijah, not content with such a delay, said to Elisha; *“Go back again, what have I done to you?”*. As though he says to him: ‘I am not the one who called you to ministry, it is God who did; Why, then, do you postpone it? You can go back, not just to say farewell to your parents, but even to stay with them and with your land’.

He said so, probably to confirm to him that the call is not compulsory; for God does not force anyone to minister to Him. Let him, therefore, go back, think about it, and freely choose the way he wishes to go.

- + Some of you, here, may feel the warmth of the divine call, and in them, the desire for the good life would actively stir up. But when they leave this holy place, the fire cools down, and the desire is put off.... What should you do to deal with such a situation?... Once this desire is enflamed inside you, set forth on your way to the angels to stir it more up. ... Do not say: I shall discuss it with my wife; and sort my things out! For such a delay will be the beginning of slothfulness! ... Remember how Elisha asked Elijah to allow him to kiss his parents farewell, and the latter did not let him.... And how someone asked the Lord Christ to go and bury his father before following Him; and the Lord did not allow him to do even that (Luke 9: 60). ... Why?

For the Devil is always ready to attack with violence, searching for some hidden way to enter! And although such excuses may seem simple and logic, yet he uses them to reach a bigger goal -- a serious slothfulness. That is why we are advised "*not to postpone it from day to day*" (Sirach 5: 7).

- + Obedience to Christ demands from us, therefore, not to postpone it even for a moment, even if the situation seems to be of utmost importance.

(St. John Chrysostom)

"So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and served him" (21)

Elisha turned back from him, not to think about accepting the call or rejecting it, nor about choosing the proper time to start work, but instantly slaughtered a yoke of oxen, and used the wooden equipment as fuel to boil their flesh, and gave to the people to eat.

Let us now think about Elisha's rich parents, who did not hinder their son's decision to forsake all his possessions to minister to the Lord, and did not count it as loss.

- + The Lord does not want us to forsake all our interests at once, but gradually; unless we are as zealous as Elisha, who slaughtered his oxen and gave the people to eat; so as not to be any longer preoccupied with what may distract him from his new dedication to the prophetic task.

(St. Ambrose)

Here, talking about the mutual work between the elder and the youthful ministers, whose roles consummate one another, St. Ambrose says:

- + How beautiful is the unity between the elder and the young minister: one testifies, and the other gives comfort; one leads, and the other follow suit ... Although the Holy Book did not tell much about how old Elisha was, yet we may perceive that he was younger than Elijah. In the Book of Acts, we read how Barnabas took Mark with him, and how Paul took Silas (Acts 40; 15: 39), Timothy (Acts 16: 2), and Titus 1: 5).

We may notice the division of labor among them; ... how the elders gave counsel, and the youth, show the activity of work. They, most probably, were similar in virtue, but not in the number of years; they rejoiced in their unity, as Peter and John did. We read in the gospel that John was a young man, as testified by his own words; and yet he was not less than the elders, in worthiness and wisdom; he bore the features of maturity of mind, and personality.

(St. Ambrose)

Three encounters took place between Elijah and the heavenlies:

- a- The first encounter with an angel who touched him, and sought from him to arise and eat.
- b- The second encounter when the angel came back a second time, and touched him and sought from him to arise and eat, to go in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, as far as Horeb the

mountain of God, to enter into a cave, most probably the same one into which the prophet Moses entered.

- c- The third encounter with the God of angels Himself, with whom he debated in the midst of “*a sound of sheer silence*” . According to the scholar Tertullian, Elijah saw God as ‘longsuffering’, sitting on the gentle and peaceful divine throne; He who was not in the midst of the sound of the strong wind, nor in the dark clouds. That was what Elijah saw in his third encounter, when the Spirit of God came, accompanied by perseverance (longsuffering) in an unseen way.

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 19

LET ME SEE YOU ON MOUNT HOREB

- + At Mount Horeb, the children of Israel encamped;
And saw the mountain burn, and the smoke filling the sky;
They saw the rocks break, and heard the horrible and dreadful wind;
While Moses was up on the mountain, receiving Your Law from Your own hands;
The hearts of the people were very disturbed;
Whereas Moses’ heart was shaking with joy, for encountering his beloved Creator.

- + On the same Mount, the prophet Elijah encountered with You;
There were strong wind, earthquake, and fire, as well;
But amid “*the sound of sheer silence*”, he enjoyed debating with You;
He forgot then all about Jezebel’s opposition;
All despair vanished from his heart, when he was told about the few remnant, holy to You;

His encounter with You filled his heart with hope;
And opened up the gates of heaven before his eyes.

+ You descended, O my God, down to my earth;
You were born in a manger, to let me enjoy seeing You;
There, I no longer hear the sound of a strong wind;
Nor be disturbed by a quake;
Nor fear a fire;
For the God of nature, came to me; “does not cry out, nor cause His voice
to be heard in the street” (Isaiah 42: 2);
Let me enjoy seeing You inside me;
Let me enter with You, into an unceasing debate;
Let me forget the valley of tears;
Let me have no fear of the events;
Let me enjoy You, O my heart’s desire.

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CHAPTER 20

AHAB'S CONQUEST OVER BEN-HADAD

In the last chapter we saw how the soul of the prophet Elijah was embittered because of the apostasy of Israel from God, and their persecution of His prophets. Seeing how his heart was full of zeal on the glory of the Lord, He revealed to him about the hidden few remnant among the people, and His plan to chastise the house of Ahab. But, God, in His longsuffering, gave Ahab another chance, hoping for his return to Him.

God allowed Ben-Hadad king of Syria to demand from Ahab his silver, gold, and loveliest wives and children; and when he consented, he said that he will send his servants to search his house and the houses of his servants, to take whatever is pleasant in Ahab's eyes. And when Ahab sought the counsel of all the elders of the land, who refused that request; God sent a prophet to Ahab to confirm to him that He is going to grant him conquest over Ben-Hadad. He actually defeated him in two battles; and when Ben-Hadad fell into his hands, contrary to God's command, he made a treaty with him, and sent him away. Here, the divine verdict was issued to take Ahab's life for Ben-Hadad's life; and the people of Israel for the people of Aram.

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1- BEN-HADAD SEEKS ALL WHAT BELONG TO AHAB:

“Now Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his forces together; there were 32 kings with him with horses and chariots. And he went up, put Samaria under siege, and made war against it. Then he sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel, and said to him, ‘Thus says Ben-Hadad: Your silver and your gold are mine; your loveliest wives and children are mine’. And the king of Israel answered and said, ‘My Lord, O king, just as you say, I and all that I have are yours’. (1-4)

This Ben-Hadad is probably the son or grandson of Ben-Hadad who helped Asa against Baasha (1 Kings 15: 18). He put Samaria under siege, together with 32 kings; who were actually not kings of surrounding countries who were his allies, but most probably governors of provinces affiliated to the kingdom of Aram (24), or heads of tribes. For the kingdom of Aram stretched from the Euphrates to the northern frontier of Israel. And in the Assyrian inscriptions it came that Aram included a great number of very small kingdoms.

Some Phoenician and Syrian kings, each reigning on a single city, had complete independence, but joined forces in military actions for the sake of defense or offense; and the king of the major city – Damascus -- was the head of the whole pact.

He intended to put Samaria under siege, either for the sake of material gains, or for political reasons. King David submitted the Aramites, and committed them to pay taxes; but the apostasy of Israel from God, turned Aram into a source of terror to

her. Asa king of Judah asked Aram to invade Israel (1 kings 15: 18-20); Now, Aram attempts to invade Israel on her own.

As Samaria was a new city, not fortified as it should be, Ben-Hadad threatens to put it under siege, unless Ahab submits to him; not just to pay taxes, but to present all what he has of silver, gold, and his loveliest wives and children; Namely, that Israel would become completely under the authority of Aram; on account of that having the women of a defeated king, makes him the king in his place.

It so seems that Ben-Hadad expected that Ahab would refuse to comply to his demands; and he would then put the city under siege, and take it completely over. For a king would possibly give up his treasures of silver and gold, to save his life; but he would never deliver his whole household of wives and children.

By accepting all Ben-Hadad's demands, saying that he and all what he has is his, Ahab assumed that he might manage to appease Ben-Hadad's anger, to enter with him into a constructive debate. He was so humiliated by sin, that he lost all self-respect and confidence, to the extent of shamefully accepting to give up all the treasures of the kingdom , beside his loveliest wives and children. By denying himself of God, the source of his power and protection, and by revolting against God, and refusing to have Him reign over his whole life and possessions, he ended up being a slave to a heathen king.

The silver and gold which Ahab prepared for Baal (Hosea 2: 8), were taken over by the enemy.

Although Ahab knew by experience the helplessness and vanity of Baal; Yet, to please his wife, and probably for the sake of satisfying his own covetousness, he worshipped Baal, and forced the people to do the same; denying himself the true God, who could support him and grant him the spirit of strength, conquest, and honor.

“Then the messengers came back and said, ‘Thus speaks Ben-Hadad, saying, Indeed I have sent to you, saying, you shall deliver to me your silver, your gold, your wives, and your children” (5)

The humiliation and contrition of Ahab, encouraged Ben-Hadad to become more arrogant. He was not satisfied just to get all what Ahab had of silver, gold, wives, and children, but he demanded to send him messengers to take over all what is pleasant in Ahab's eyes. In his earlier demand he sought the king's treasures and household; but now he intends to insult and humiliate him, through letting his servants take over all what pleases him, even if they are not intending to use them. According to some, he intended to confiscate his gods and all the tools of their worship; and according to others he intended to rob the people of all what are worthy of their possessions.

2- BEN-HADAD OVERDOES IT AGAINST AHAB:

“But I will send my servants to you about this time, and they shall search your house, and the houses of your servants. And it shall be that whatever is pleasant in your eyes, they shall put in their hands, and take it” (6)

3- AHAB PREPARES FOR THE BATTLE AGAINST BEN-HADAD::

“Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, ‘Notice, please, and see how this man seeks trouble, for he sent to me for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold; and I did not deny him” (7)

He did not seek the counsel of the elders of the land, the first time, for he counted it as his personal responsibility to decide what concerns his own treasures, wives; and children; but after receiving his second message, demanding the entrance of his servants to rob the people of their possessions, he was committed to seek the counsel of the elders of the land, who, in their turn, considered Ben-Hadad's demand an unbearable insult, and counseled the king to reject it completely.

“And all the elders and all the people said to him, ‘do not listen nor consent’. Therefore he said to the messengers of Ben-Hadad, ‘Tell my Lord the king, ‘All that you sent for t your servant the first time I will do, but this thing I cannot do’. And the messengers departed and brought back word to him” (8, 9)

Encouraged by the counsel of the elders, Ahab responded to Ben-Hadad's threat, that, although he is committed to what he consented to do in his response to the first message, yet he cannot consent to Ben-Hadad's demand in his second message.

“Then Ben-Hadad sent to him and said, ‘The gods do so to me, and more also, if enough dust is left in Samaria for a handful for each of the people who follow me” (10)

Ben-Hadad answered Ahab by a proverb in which he proclaims that when Samaria is destroyed, each one of his army will not find a handful of its dust; which refers, beside his arrogance and haughtiness, to the multitude of his army, and to their military might. This response came to be like that of Trachinian in Thermoplae, that the arrows of the Persians would turn the sun light into darkness.

“So the king of Israel answered and said, ‘tell him, not let the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off” (11)

Ahab answered by another parable that was common in the East, and sent by kings to their enemies, which is that it is not befitting of him who puts on the armor to boast like the one who actually went to the battle and returned victorious. He needs first to go to battle, win victory before having the right to boast. *“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth”* (Proverb 27: 1). Let him wait to see the outcome of the battle.

*“And it happened when Ben-Hadad heard the message, as he and the kings were drinking at the command post,
that he said to his servants, ‘Get ready’, and they got ready to attack the city”* (12)

Ben-Hadad issued his military command by lips wet with wine, which refers beforehand to his future defeat, despite his mighty possibilities, and his trust in himself and in his army; In that he was like ‘Belshazzar’, king of Babylon, who lost his whole empire while drinking wine (Daniel 5).

According to Solomon the sage: *“Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink aroused brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise”* (Proverb 20: 1); *“He who loves pleasure, will be a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not be rich”* (Proverbs 21: 17); *“Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat”* (Proverbs 23: 20); *“Do not look on the wine when it is red; when it sparkles in the cup; when it swirls around smoothly”* (Proverbs 23: 31); and it is also said, *“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; not for princes intoxicating drink”* (Proverbs 31: 4).

On the danger of getting drunk, commenting on what happened to Noah, who lost his composure and got naked even before his own sons, St. Jerome says: [No one should claim that drinking wine is not a sin, when just one hour, during which Noah drank wine, bared him naked, who for 600 years lived respectable. Spoiling the

soul will ultimately lead to falling into lust. Once the stomach is stuffed, the other members of the body will stir up]. And according to St. Ambrose: [How great is the dominion of wine; that made him, on whom the great flood could not prevail, become naked].

He issued his command for his army to move, but he himself could not, because he was drunk; assuming that it was a matter of few hours for his army to take over Samaria after destroying it completely.

4- AHAB'S CONQUEST IN THE FIRST BATTLE AGAINST BEN-HADAD::

“Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, Have you seen all this multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord’” (13)

Although Ahab did not ask help from God, nor pray to Him, or seek the support of a prophet, yet God initiated Ahab with His love and care, and sent to him a prophet carrying a gentle message, for the following reasons:

- To offer those miserable people who went down to evil, the chance to repent and to renew the covenant with Him.
- To offer the king a new chance to repent; or else, by persisting on his disobedience, he would consummate the cup of his evil.
- To break down the pride and haughtiness of Ben-Hadad.
- To confirm to us that it is He, who searches for us, and sends to us His prophets and messengers; and ultimately, He, Himself, will come down to us.

Ahab resorted to the elders of the land, who pledged to stand by him; whereas the prophet came without an invitation, not to support him, but to confirm to him the conquest from God.

We do not know the identity of that prophet sent by God to Ahab, whom the interpreter Rabbis identify as Micah, mentioned in 1 kings 22: 8. We hear nothing about Elijah, nor his disciple Elisha. Elijah probably was in the kingdom of Judah preparing Elisha for the prophetic work. By his departure from Israel, Jezebel probably calmed down, appeased her persecution against the believers; and the hundred prophets whom Obadiah sustained, got the chance to come out of their caves to resume their ministry on an individual or family level.

By an exalted divine wisdom, God did not send Elijah to Ahab; He probably intended to give Ahab and Jezebel the chance to deal with another prophet, to start a new page, particularly after Ahab's humiliation before Ben-Hadad.

By drawing Ahab's attention to the great size of Ben-Hadad's army, which, according to some was 130,000; the prophet intended to confirm that God grants him conquest, to let him know that God is the Lord. Yet, when the words of the prophet were fulfilled, we did not hear that Ahab or his people offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving or praise to God who granted them such a great victory.

"So Ahab said, 'By whom?' and he said, 'Thus says the Lord, 'By the young men who serve the district governors'.

Then he said, 'Who shall begin the battle?' and he answered, 'You'".(14)

Ahab asked by whom will he fight; to which the answer was, 'By the young men who serve the district governors, who, most probably had little military experience; after many of the governors fled to the capital, when the enemy got as far as

Galilee and north of Samaria. And when Ahab asked who will begin the battle, the answer was, 'Israel'.

"Then he mustered the young men who served the district governors, and there were 232, and after them he mustered all the people, all the children of Israel, seven thousand"
(15)

The 232 young men at the head of the army were most probably the royal guards of the king's palace, and following them were 7000, who, according to some Jewish interpreters, were the ones who never bowed their knees before Baal, nor kissed him with their mouths; by whom God works and grants conquest.

"So they went out at noon. Meanwhile Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings helping him were getting drunk at the command post. The young men of the provinces went out first; and Ben-Hadad sent out a patrol, and they told him, saying, 'Men are coming out of Samaria. So he said, 'If they have come out for peace, take them alive; and if they have come out for war, take them alive'" (16-18)

The battle started at noon, while Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings were drinking wine despising any movement by Israel. When Ben-Hadad sent a patrol to tell him what was going on, they told him that men are coming out of Samaria; most probably the 232 constituting the first batch of warriors. With confidence, being sure in his conquest, he commanded them to take them alive, whether they came out for peace or war.

"Then those young men of the provinces went out of the city with the army which followed them; and each one

killed his men. So the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them; and Ben-Hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the cavalry. Then the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and the chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter” (19-21)

Being shocked by his great defeat, the king of Aram in his drunkard condition did not think of confronting the Israeli army coming against him, as much as of fleeing with his own life; which caused a great confusion in his army.

5- BEN-HADAD’S PLAN REVEALED:

“And the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, ‘Go, strengthen yourself, take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come against you” (21)

Although Ahab did not call the prophet to give thanks to God for his conquest, God, for the second time, initiated with His love, sent the prophet to reveal to him the secret plan of the king of Aram, to come against him in the spring of the year; and to ask him to get ready for him all the year long.

In the first battle, although Ahab had no possibility, nor time to get prepared for the war; Yet God let him conquer by the few who were with him. But now, when he has a full year ahead, God demanded from him to get prepared, to work with the multitude.

The prophet made it clear that the enemy would never give up; if he loses a battle, he plans for another. ... It is befitting of God’s children to be perpetually prepared to strive against the devil, their eternal enemy. If God calls us to sonhood to Him,

the devil, on his part, unceasingly does his best to make us his own. We are in a perpetual war; yet, in it, we find our continuous conquest, by the divine grace.

- + The devil carries a bow and arrows against me; but I have a sword. We should learn his ways; Carrying a bow, he does not dare to come near me, but aims his arrows from afar.
- + The devil's plan, to deny us the blessings we have, in an attempt to bring us over to a steep cliff; to cast us down to the pit. But God, in His love, did not fail to care for us.

God showed the devil how foolish he is in his attempts; and showed man His great care for him; By death, He granted the eternal life; While the devil drove man out of paradise; God led him to heaven.

- + God shows the devil that, although he may plot tens of thousands of plans against mankind; he will never prevail, for God perpetually leads us to a greater honor.

You have lost paradise, but God, with His compassion, opened heaven up before you.

You fell under judgment for sometime; yet you will be honored by an eternal life.

By God's command, the earth grows thorns and thistles; whereas the soil of the spirit gives you fruition.

Can't you see how the benefit is greater than the loss?!

- + Seeing someone who has killed his son, a loving father, will not only punish the criminal, but will destroy the weapon which he used. So it is when the Lord Christ sees that the devil has killed a man, He will not only punish the devil, but will destroy his weapon as well.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Then the servants of the king of Syria said to him: ‘Their gods are gods of the hills. Therefore, they were stronger than we. But if we fight against them in the plain; then surely we will be stronger than them. So do this thing: Dismiss the kings, each from his position, and put captains in their places’”
(23, 24)

According to the heathens, every region has its god, on which he has authority, and proclaims his power; whereas outside it, he cannot prevail. Hence the servants of the king of Syria counseled him to do it again the next year, choose the battle ground a plain or a valley, and not a hill or a mountain; and indicated to him, that the best time would be spring after the rain season, when the army can easily move (1 Samuel 11: 1).

The servants of the king probably gave him this counsel for the following reasons:

- 1- The Jews offer their sacrifices on the high places; hence their God must be a God of mountains..
- 2- In the midst of mountains, the huge size of Ben-Hadad's army would not be apparent; whereas on the plains their great number would be intimidating to the Israelites. Hence, Ben-Hadad chose the region of 'Aphek' in the plains of Jezreel.
- 3- They probably were aware of certain psalms by which king David used to praise the Lord; like: *“I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence comes my help”* (Psalm 121: 1); *“His foundations are in the holy mountains”* (Psalm 87: 1 and what came in psalm 15: 1; 24: 3 about the holy hill.

They also counseled him to change the leadership, and to dismiss those who inherited it by birth, and replace them by worthy and capable men of war.

“And you shall muster an army like the army you have lost, horse for horse and chariot for chariot. Then we will

fight them in the plain; surely we will be stronger than they. And he listened to their voice and did so” (25).

So it was, in the spring of the year, that Ben-Hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel” (26)

In the spring of the new year, Ben-Hadad with his army went close to ‘Aphek’, not ‘Aphek’, in the land of Asher (Joshua 19: 30; 13: 40); nor that on the mountains of Judah (Joshua 15: 53), but a city in the plains of Jezreel (1 Samuel 29: 1). Most probably it is ‘Phek’, a large village on the present highway between Damascus, Naples and Jerusalem. Saying, “*He went (up) to Aphek*’ is appropriate, because it is on a higher level than Damascus.

“And the children of Israel were mustered and given provisions, and they went against them. Now the children of

Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the countryside” (27)

This analogy to “*two little flocks of goats*” refers to the little number of the Israelites compared to the huge size of the enemy forces.

6- AHAB’S CONQUEST IN THE SECOND BATTLE AGAINST BEN-HADAD::

“Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘Because the Syrians

have said, 'The Lord is God of the hills, and He is not God of the valleys', therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord" (28)

God sent a prophet, probably a different one than the one He sent a year ago, to proclaim the conquest of that tiny army. Because the Syrians blasphemed against the Lord, limiting Him to a certain location; God intended to show them that He dwells everywhere.

"And they encamped opposite each other for seven days. So it was that on the seventh day the battle began, and the children of Israel killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day" (29).

But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city. Then the wall fell on twenty-seven thousand of the men who were left. And

Ben-Hadad fled and went into the city to hide, into an inner chamber"
(30)

The two armies encamped opposite each other for seven days, probably to put their plans on the ground; or to spy on one another to reveal their possibilities. On the seventh day the battle began, and the surprise was that the Israelites killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day. The rest fled to the fortified city of Aphek, but probably an earthquake happened, and the walls of the city fell and killed the twenty-seven thousand of the men who fled there; And Aphek came to be a city with no walls, where Ben-Hadad set forth to hide, into an inner chamber.

And the servants of Ben-Hadad who had no place to go, counseled the king to join them in putting sackcloth around their waists, and ropes around their heads; and to go out to the king of Israel, as though to let him, if he so chooses to hang them, or

to lead them bound as captives of war; ... an utter submission, and a show of remorse.

“And his servants said to him, ‘Look now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings.

Please let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare you life” (31).

So they wore sackcloth around their waists and put ropes around their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, ‘Your servant Ben-Hadad says, ‘Please let me live’. And he said, ‘Is he still alive? He is my brother”’ (32)

In his blasphemy against the living God, Ben-Hadad was arrogant and haughty; and intended to humiliate the king of Israel; by taking, not only his silver and gold, but his loveliest wives and children. Now, All what he wished for was to let him live under any condition, even as a slave or a captive outside his country the rest of his life in shame and disgrace. After swearing and threatening, now he is crushingly pleading his enemy to spare his life;

Ahab’s situation was amazing. He disobeyed the divine command addressed to him by the man of God, namely, not to let Ben-Hadad live, who beside his greed, had haughtily and arrogantly blasphemed against God. ... Was he deceived by the way Ben-Hadad and his servants approached him in humiliation? ... Or his intention was to gain his support against Assyria whose star started to shine politically in the region? ... Or he probably, feeling self-satisfaction to see his enemy in such a condition of fear and humiliation; wished to show off some kind of generosity and nobility? ... Anyway, Ahab disregarded the divine command, to act according to his own human mind.

He did not punish Ben-Hadad even by one word for his blasphemy against God; He did not let him know that his conquest on him was for the glory of God; and that his shameful defeat was because of his blasphemy against the Lord. ... As a matter of fact, Ahab was never preoccupied with the Lord, nor referred to Him in any way.

It was befitting of him to take a lesson of what happened to king Saul in the old, when he left Agag, his enemy, alive, contrary to God's command (1 Samuel 15: 9). He should have called the man of God who has informed him of his conquest, and confirmed to him that it is from God, to seek from him the counsel of the Lord.

He made a treaty with Ben-Hadad, and did not make a covenant with God. He made it, not out of generosity and nobility, but of weakness, foolishness, and lack of wisdom. He did not even seek a pay back for all the losses he suffered since the day Ben-Hadad started to threaten him. He was seduced by Ben-Hadad's promise to restore to him the cities that his father took from Omri the father of Ahab; and to allow the Jews to set up marketplaces for themselves in Damascus, where they would live, practice their trade, and worship.

Although Ahab presented a shining show off of amnesty, compassion, mercy, and generosity; Yet God deals with man, not according to the appearance, but to the heart, the inner intention, and the true purity.

"Now the men were diligently watching to see whether any sign of mercy would come from him; and they quickly grasped at this word and said, 'Your brother Ben-Hadad'. So he said, 'Go, bring him'. Then Ben-Hadad came out to him; and he had him come up into the chariot." (33)

7- A TREATY BETWEEN AHAB AND BEN-HADAD:

"Then Ben-Hadad said to him, 'The cities which my father took from your father, I will restore; and you may set up marketplace for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria'. Then Ahab said, 'I will send you away with this treaty'. So he made a treaty with him and sent him away" (34)

Ahab was more preoccupied with the mental and material benefits; than with acquiring God Himself, the secret of conquest and riches.

- + Do not seek anything other than God Himself. Seek him alone, and despise anything else. Let your way be only toward Him. Do not seek riches, nor temporary honors that would eventually go away Forget anything else, and only remember Him. Leave all the other things behind, and approach Him. Let Him be your hope; He who leads you to your destiny.
- + Forsake all your desires; for He, who created heaven and earth is more beautiful than all, better than all; and will be for you everything you love. Learn to love the Creator in His creation; in the work He did. Never let what He did take hold of you, and make you lose Him, who created you.

(St. Augustine)

8- A PROPHET DECLARES THE DIVINE VERDICT ON AHAB:

"Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his neighbor by the word of the Lord, 'Strike me please'. And the man refused to strike him" (35)

It so seems, after killing the prophets of God, and the escape of Elijah, that Jezebel calmed down a great deal; and the prophets started to come out of their caves.

The main training in the school of the prophets concentrated on complete obedience. Therefore, when a prophet sought from his neighbor to strike him by the word of God, and he refused to do that; Because of his disobedience of the word of God, the first prophet, 'Micah', according to some, (1 kings 20: 8), prophesied to him that a lion will kill him. ... As a son of the prophets, he should perceive, without hesitation, that what the Lord commands during the time of prophecy, bore a symbolic meaning; hence they have to be obeyed, until the time come to know the meaning behind it. The divine command was for the prophet to appear before Ahab the king to seek his judgment, as though he was wounded in the battle for the sake of his country, the king, and the people; but he committed a mistake, of not keeping a man delivered to him, but lost him.

The king uttered his judgment, not perceiving that it was he, himself, who has committed that mistake; From his own mouth he issued the verdict, that his soul would be sought for that of Ben-Hadad; and his people for his people.

"Then he said to him, 'Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, surely, as soon as you depart from me, a lion shall kill you. And as soon as he left him, a lion found him and killed him" (36)

"And he found another man and said, 'Strike me please'. So the man struck him, inflicting a wound" (37)

"Then the prophet departed and waited for the king by the road, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes" (38)

"Now, as the king passed by, he cried out to the king and said, 'Your servant went into the midst of the battle;

and there a man came over and brought a man to me, and said, 'Guard this man, if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver" (39)

“And while your servant was busy here and there, he was gone’. And the king of Israel said to him, ‘So shall

your judgment be; you yourself have decided it” (40)

“Then he hastened to take the bandage away from his eyes; and the king of Israel recognized him as one of

the prophets” (41)

.” And he said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have let slip out of your hand a man whom I appointed

to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people” (42)

“So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased, and came to Samaria” (43)

Some may wonder: Does God seek from us to kill the captives of war? No way! ... Ben-Hadad here,(in the Old Covenant), represents the devil, the deceptive and blasphemer. When we have the chance to take away every trace of him from our life, or from that of our children, we would not open the door before him anew. Ben-Hadad here, refers to the importance of getting rid of the evil behaviors.

“The king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased, and came to Samaria”. After his victory, he came back displeased, yet he did not think of repentance; nor listened to the voice of David, saying, “Now, therefore, be wise, O kings; ... Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2: 10, 11).

- + The Holy Book insists on the fact that the commandments of God are sorrowful; on account of that the soul that so finds them, has not accepted the sources of grace, which make the commandments of God sweet and rejoicing; and would then pray with longing and faithfulness for the sake of hastening to keep them.

(St. Augustine)

God has no partiality

+ *"Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart"* (Psalm 73: 1). ... Does this mean that God is not good to everyone else? ... Of course He is; He is the Savior of all mankind, of the believer in particular; Hence *"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19: 10); *The Lamb of God* has truly come *"to take away the sin of the world"* (John 1: 29), and to heal our wounds. Yet, taking into consideration that, not everyone wishes for treatment, that is why He heals only those who wish to be healed, and do not reject it ... Those who seek treatment may have their good health restored; whereas those who oppose the physician, would not benefit from his services..... The physician, therefore, is seen as 'good' to those to whom he restored their good health. And God is 'good' to those whose sin He has forgiven. But in case someone has a sin, for which he seeks no forgiveness, how could he say that the Physician is 'good'; when he avoids Him? That is why, as I previously said, the apostle made it truly clear that *"God desires all men to be saved"* (1 Timothy 2: 4). He is 'good' to all men; yet the special grace of God's goodness, is more available to all the believers who get the help of His good will and grace.

(St. Ambrose)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 20

GRANT ME CONQUEST UPON MYSELF BESIDE MY CONQUEST UPON BEN-HADAD

+ The wicked Ahab had conquest on Ben-Hadad the blasphemer of Your name;

Yet, he did not have conquest upon himself;

+ Sin humiliated Ahab, the promoter of idol-worship;
He lost his honor and his possibilities;
He was destroyed by the threats of Ben-Hadad king of Aram;
He was ready to surrender to him his treasures, wives, and children;
In Your love, You offered to him new chances to experience Your power;
You granted him conquest upon Ben-Hadad in a battle on the hills;
Then You granted him conquest on him in a battle on the plains;
The arrogant became humble to You;
He who intended to take your treasures, wives and children, became in your hands;

What have you offered Your God who granted you the conquest?

+ Instead of thanksgiving, you broke His commandment;
Instead of renewing the covenant with Him, you made a treaty with the heathen king;
He granted you conquest on your worst enemy;
But you, by your own free will, did not seek a conquest upon your own depths.

+ Grant me, O Lord, conquest upon myself;
For no one, nor any power can harm me;
But I, with my own free will, destroy myself.

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CHAPTER 21

HE MURDERED AND TOOK POSSESSION

In the Septuagint version, this chapter came before the last one; so that what happened concerning taking possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite preceded the war between Ahab and Ben-Hadad; an order also adopted by the Historian Josephus.

Ahab was so preoccupied by his palaces and gardens, that he desired to acquire the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which was next to Ahab's winter palace in Jezreel.. He was ready to pay its worth in money to Naboth, or to give him a better one instead.

When Naboth refused to sell the inheritance of his fathers, the wicked Jezebel planned to have him murdered. The priestess of Baal accused him of blasphemy against the name of the living God, and that of the king; as though the murderess of the prophets is zealous on the name of the living God. She murdered and took possession. God sent the prophet Elijah to rebuke Ahab; to find him, for the first time ever, put on sackcloth, fast, and walk with humility. For that, God, in His exalted mercy, said to the prophet Elijah: *"Because Ahab has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days, but in the days of his son; I will bring the calamity on his house"* (28).

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|---|--------|
| 1- Ahab seeks the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite | 1 - 4 |
| 2- Jezebel ordered the murder of Naboth | 5 - 16 |

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 3- The prophet Elijah encounters Ahab | 17 - 26 |
| 4- Ahab humbles himself | 27 – 29 |

1- AHAB SEEKS THE VINEYARD OF NABOTH THE JEZREELITE:

Naboth probably boasted that his vineyard was next to the king's winter palace, not perceiving that he will lose his life for the sake of that neighborhood. That is why the counsel of many fathers of the Church was: [Keep away from the rulers to save yourself from trouble].

As to Ahab, he is now breaking the tenth divine commandment, by coveting what is his neighbor's. He could have rented the vineyard; and do any improvement he likes, to enjoy it all his life; but he only sought to possess it; and when he could not, he fell ill.

Being an Israelite who fears God, Naboth, cherished the inheritance of his fathers. He had no intention to insult the king, nor to disobey his commands; but he felt a commitment to keep the divine law that utterly forbids man to sell his inheritance to another; specially if he belongs to another tribe; And if he does, for some reason, he may have it back in the seventh year, namely in the year of the Jubilee (Leviticus 25: 23-28; Numbers 36: 7). Refusing to sell the vineyard did not come out of love for it, nor of stubbornness toward the king; but was based upon his obedience to the divine commandment.

“And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel next to the

palace of ahab king of Samaria” (1)

. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, ‘Give me your vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because

it is near, next to my house; and for it, I will give you a vineyard better than it; or if it seems good to you, I will

give you its worth in money' (2).

And Naboth said to Ahab, 'The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you" (3)

What preoccupied the heart of Ahab was his own pleasure, assuming that by his authority or wealth, he could fulfill everything, even if it is contrary to the divine law. Whereas what preoccupied the heart of Naboth was the divine commandment; for him there was nothing worth breaking it.

Naboth, most probably was one of the 7000, whose knees did not bow to Baal, and whose lips did not kiss him. He obeyed God more than men; and saw in giving away his portion in the promised land, even for the king's sake, a sign of his slothfulness of his eternal inheritance for the sake of man, whatever his position is. According to St. Ambrose, he held fast to the inheritance of his fathers.

- + If Naboth defended his vineyard by his blood; and did not give away the inheritance of his father, shall I give away the inheritance of Christ? ... As a bishop, I say: Let the emperor act as an emperor; Let him even take my life, but not my faith.

(St. Ambrose)

"So Ahab went into the house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken

to him, for he had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers'. And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food" (4)

Ahab's behavior was childish. Instead of seriously thinking in a mature way, he got depressed to the extent of falling ill on his bed. His pride, greed, and desire for pleasures, made him physically and psychologically ill.

In the last chapter, we saw Ahab return to his house sullen and displeased, when the prophet revealed to him his wrongdoing. Now, we see him sullen and displeased because Naboth intends to obey God more than him. He was living in his royal palace, enjoying the pleasures of the land of Canaan; a house full of everything precious; an undisputed authority; and honorably sitting on the throne. Yet his spirit was sick, his soul moaned with affliction, and his body sick. The real problem was not in Naboth's refusal to give him his vineyard, but was in the depths of Ahab's heart; Depression was the fruit of giving the back to God, the source of Joy. Instead of feeling satisfaction, and giving thanks to God, man feels he is in trouble, from which he cannot emerge; and punishes himself by depression and grief. The apostle Paul was thrown into a dungeon, his hands and feet bound in chains, his body covered with blood; and above all, denied the freedom to consummate his preaching mission among the people; Yet, he was exultant and praising the Lord; no depression could ever swallow his spirit, nor grief could find a place in his soul.

Ahab loved the vineyard, but disregarded the Creator of the vineyard.

- + You may ask: Why should I not love the world, which is the creation of God? Brother, Whoever loves anyone or anything, but not for the sake of God, his love for God would be too little to mention. To love the created things for their own sake, would be greed and not love.
- + You have the choice: Either to love the temporal things, and pass away together with them, or not to love them and stay with God forever.
- + Our Lord Jesus Christ became a Man – to plant Himself on the bank of the river of time. If you feel that you are carried away with the torrent of the love of the world, hasten to hold fast to Christ, on account of that, for your sake, He entered into the time; yet He did not cease to remain eternal.

(St. Augustine)

2- JEZEBEL MURDERS NABOTH:

“But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food? (5)

“So he said to her: ‘Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money, or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it’, and he answered, “I will not give you my vineyard’ “ (6)

“Then Jezebel his wife said to him, ‘You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise and eat food, and let your heart be cheerful. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite’” (7)

Telling his wife the conversation between him and Naboth the Jezreelite, Ahab did not mention the reason for his refusal to sell the vineyard - the divine commandment; probably for fear of referring to the name of God in his talk to her,

Under the pretense of giving comfort to her sullen husband, she fed up his pride, and ignited the live coal inside him. She counted his behavior, his sullenness, and his refrain from eating food, an insult to his position as a king of authority, who should give commands; that the whole issue is too small for him as a king to think of; that entering into a debate with a commoner like Naboth, is insulting to him and to the royal throne; and that it is not befitting of him to buy and sell, but should command to be obeyed. So she gave the king a lesson in haughtiness, arrogance, and misuse of authority; she told him that she, the queen, will give him the vineyard of Naboth free and with no labor.

It is as though she is saying to him: 'Who is the king? You or Naboth? If Naboth refuses your demand, he is then the king of authority; and you are not the king, submitting to his refusal.

"So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letter to the elders and the nobles

who were dwelling in the city with Naboth" (8)

"And she wrote in the letter, saying, 'Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people" (9)

"And seat two men, scoundrels, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, 'You have blasphemed God and the king'. Then take him out and stone him, that he may die"'

(10)

After giving the king a lesson of the concept of royalty and authority, she intended to give another to Naboth in the concept of submission and obedience to the king; even though against the divine commandment. She would not accept less than shedding his blood as a price of keeping and honoring the divine commandment, more than the royal command.

She sent a letter to the elders and the nobles of Jezreel, who were tools in her hand, to move at her will; sealed with the royal seal to confirm that what it contain is a very serious issue that touches the prestige and security of the state. Sealing the royal letters was known by the pharaohs of Egypt since about 2000 years B.C.; the seals were mentioned in the days of Esther the queen (Esther 3: 12); and by Job 38: 41.

It so seems that it was not the first time she used the seal of the king on whatever she wrote. She most probably used it when she sent letters to order the killing of the prophets of the Lord. In her present letter she demanded from the elders to seek a false testimony against Naboth, and to condemn him to death; without

referring to the reason for that. She did not bother to send false witness on her own, but demanded from the judges to do that, then to issue the verdict, they know is false. That could never happen unless she knows for sure that they have lost their faithfulness and honor; unless she had complete trust in their obedience at the expense of the truth; as though she is a serpent spitting venom through them.

She covered her plan under a religious garment; as the first charge was blaspheming God and the king; accusing him of what she herself has committed in a horrible way; namely blaspheming God and oppressing Him, and killing His prophets; and demanded that the trial should be carried out in a tight way that carries the pretension of justice.

The verdict of blaspheming God was to be stoned to death (Leviticus 24: 16; John 10: 33); followed by erecting a column of stone at the site of stoning, as a testimony to the crime committed.

Blaspheming the king was not a second crime for which Naboth was tried, but an extension of the first one; as a steward of God.

Jezebel demanded from the elders to proclaim a fast; as though the issue was so serious that required supplication and humiliation before God. It was surely not for the sake of repentance, remorse, or the return to God, but it was done by an evil priestess of idols, to cover her evil up with a spiritual cover of deception.

The elders fulfilled their task with great precision; whether for fear from Jezebel, or to gain material rewards, or for their hatred of Naboth's godliness. Naboth was publicly executed together with his children, to make sure that no one will seek the vineyard for inheritance after his death, or will seek revenge against those who unjustly murdered him. According to the law, the children were to endure the punishment together with their parents (Joshua 7: 24-25). And as Jahu said when

he killed Jehoram, “*Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons’, says the Lord*” (2 kings 9: 26).

She demanded to have the law applied in its formalities with all precision; through hiring two witnesses; for no one should be condemned to death by the testimony of one man (Deuteronomy 17: 6; 19: 5; Numbers 35: 30; Matthew 26: 60). So they chose two scoundrels, who would not hesitate to lie and to falsely swear.

The law of the apostles confirms the importance of making sure of the integrity of witnesses in the church trials. As it so often happens that two or more witnesses may falsely testify; as when the two elders testified against the chaste Susanna in Babylon (Susanna 28); when the two scoundrels testified against Naboth in Samaria (1 kings 21); when the multitudes of the Jews who testified against our Lord in Jerusalem (Matthew 26); and against Steven, His first martyr (Acts 6, 7). In the law of the apostles it came: [The witnesses have to be meek, free of evil and anger; faithful, and religious. For then, the testimony of such man would be as straightforward as their persons, and as true as their way of life].

The first charge against Naboth was that he is a blasphemer and a rebel, who attacks God by words of blasphemy, and His steward on earth, despising the honor of the crown and the throne. According to some, he was charged, as well, with idol-worship, the punishment of which was to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 12: 6; 17: 2-70; as though Jezebel accused Naboth with what she, herself has committed; but many scholars reject such a view.

According to many, the word ‘bless’, would mean both ‘bless’ and ‘curse’, and would be interpreted according to the text in which it came. We notice that, in the book of ‘Job’, when his wife said to him “*Bless the Lord and die*”; and her words were not literally translated as “Curse the Lord and die” (Job 1: 5, 11; 2: 5). And according to some, the word “Bless” is used when someone encounters another, and greets him; or when he bids him farewell as he departs; hence it bears the

meaning of blessing in the good concepts; as well as the concept 'Allow me to depart'; or 'dismiss' or 'curse'. As though blaspheming or cursing God, is like dismissing Him, or seeks from Him to depart from someone.

"So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles, who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel has sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them" (11)

"They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people" (12)

"And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, 'Naboth has blasphemed God and the king'. Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he dies" (13)

Jezebel's plan was executed to precision while she was in her palace away from the location of the crime; And yet God, the Almighty and Advocate of the oppressed was watching everything. He allows, yet for a certain time, for the devil to have authority to practice his evil, and to assume that he can prevail; about this which Solomon the Sage, amazingly says, *"There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity"* (Ecclesiastes 8: 14).

As believers, we feel that our tears mix with those of the oppressed; and our moans with the moans of their hearts; saying together with Solomon the Sage, *"Then I returned and considered all the oppressions 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, but they have no comforter"* (Ecclesiastes 4: 1)

Jezebel plotted well, and the hypocrites executed the plan in this world; but justice will not be completely fulfilled except on the great day of the Lord, when the judgment will not be in human hands, but in those of the divine Judge of the whole earth, the Searcher of the heart and mind, and the Maker of justice and mercy.

“Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, ‘Naboth has been stoned, and he is dead’” (14)

Later on, another message came from Jahu to those same elders of Jezreel , saying, *“If you are for me, and if you obey my voice, take the heads of the men, your master’s sons, and come to me at Jezreel by this time tomorrow”* (2 kings 10: 6). The elders killed the seventy sons of Ahab, and sent their heads put in baskets to Jahu in Jezreel. By the same measure done by Jezabel, it was measured to her; and from the same cup she filled, she drank.

“And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth has been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to

Ahab, ‘Arise, take the possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give to you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead’” (15)

Merrily, Jezebel set forth to tell Ahab that Naboth is no more there, but dead; and to ask him to arise and take possession of the vineyard. It was not the king’s right to inherit the vineyard of Naboth; but, according to the tradition, the king had the right to take possessions of the traitors after their execution (See 2 Samuel 16: 4).

“So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” (16)

Although it was expected from the king to send one of his men to take possession of the vineyard, yet, because he was exultant on what happened, he went down, himself, to do that.

3- ELIJAH ENCOUNTERS AHAB:

“Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it’” (17, 18)

By the death of Naboth and his children, Ahab and Jezebel assumed that there was no more problem for Ahab to take possession of the vineyard. Ahab's heart got comforted and exulted with what he possessed; But God's eyes were on the oppressed, according to the words of the prophet Habakkuk, saying, *‘You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do you look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he? Why do You make men like fish of the sea; like creeping things that have no ruler over them?’* (Habakkuk 1: 13, 14).

God of the Truth sent His prophet to the partner in the crime to take possession, right on the following day (2 kings 9: 26). Ahab did not enjoy the vineyard more than few hours, before the divine verdict came against him.

When God intended to send a message of encouragement to Ahab, on his conquest against Ben-Hadad, he sent to him a prophet every time; But now, when the situation needed to be addressed with more daring, about what will dwell upon the king and his household, God sent to him Elijah, the father of all prophets, to convey to him the divine verdict issued against him as a murderer and an oppressor.

“You shall speak to him, saying, ‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’ And you shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick the blood, even yours’” (19)

He took possession of the vineyard by shedding innocent blood, not perceiving that, *“Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed”* (Habakkuk 2: 12)

Have the dogs licked Ahab's blood at the same place where they licked Naboth's blood? That was actually realized with Jezebel; First because, as Ahab delivered the issue into her hands, and gave her his seal to execute her plan; it came to pass that shedding her blood was as though shedding Ahab's blood; and what the dogs have done to her corpse, was as though they did with that of Ahab himself. ... (The dogs licked Ahab's blood at the pond of Samaria where his chariot and weapons were washed, after he was mortally wounded at Ramoth Gilead the location believed by some to be where Naboth the Jezeelite was stoned. Whereas his son Joram was killed by an arrow in the vineyard of Naboth, and the dogs must have licked his blood, and probably devoured his corpse (2 kings 9: 25, 26); at the same location where the dogs have, as well, licked the blood, and devoured the corpse of Jezebel .

“Then Ahab said to Elijah, ‘Have you found me, O my enemy?'; and he answered, ‘I have found you because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord’” (20)

Having noticed the signs of anger on the face of the prophet Elijah, and having perceived that he was sent by God to bring to him a bitter message, Ahab considered Elijah his enemy; assuming that there was a personal animosity between him and the prophet. But Elijah made it clear to him that he, himself was his own enemy, having sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord. An evil man

is his own enemy, he sells it to become a slave of sin; according to the words of the apostle, saying, *"I am carnal, sold under sin"* (Romans 7: 14); *"For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me"* (Romans 7: 11).

It was befitting of Ahab to perceive his sin, and to humble himself instead of aggressively confronting the prophet, and calling him his enemy; although in their last confrontation after the killing of the priests of Baal, they seemed to be friends (1 kings 18: 46). But the horrible crime he committed stirred in him the feeling that God Himself has become his enemy, and His prophet has consequently so become.

The king considered whoever utters the truth to be his enemy; as the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, saying, *"Have I, therefore, become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"* (Galatians 4: 16).

Sin turned the king into a coward, who flee from confronting the truth; hence, in terror, he said to the prophet, *"Have you found me, O my enemy?"* Seeing Elijah was like when Belshazzar saw the hand writing on the wall, the divine verdict issued against him, when his knees trembled with fear (Daniel 5).

Elijah answered him, saying, *"Yes I have found you, for You cannot escape from the eyes of God, nor from His hand. He sent me to you"*.

"Behold, I will bring calamity on you; I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male from Israel, both bond and free. I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nabat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and made Israel sin" (21, 22).

The curse under which Ahab fell was like that under which Jeroboam and Baasha have fallen (1 kings 14: 10, 11; 16: 3-4)

“And concerning Jezebel, the Lord also spoke, saying, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel” (23)

In the old cities, a certain place outside the wall of a city was set aside to cast in it the trash and the corpses of the dead animals; and there, the birds of prey, and the wild dogs find their food.

“The dogs shall eat whatever belong to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field. But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up” (24, 25)

Ahab became a bad and a unique example of whoever sells himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, and who delivers himself into the hand of his heathen wife, whom he received, not from the hand of the Lord, but from that of the devil. That wicked woman had tightened her hold upon her man, as well as upon the whole kingdom.

According to St. Ambrose, whoever looks at a woman to lust, does what Ahab and Jezebel have done, who murdered and took possession what are not theirs [You take possessions of the fatherless, and deprive them of the land of their fathers].

- + When our souls long for the living God, this holy desire would become our food. But when one of us covets the wife of another, his desire would be the food of wild beasts, like that of Ahab, and of jezebel, concerning the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

(The scholar Origen)

“And he behaved very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel” (26)

4- AHAB HUMBLER HIMSELF:

“So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth , and went about mourning” (27)

Hearing the divine verdict on the mouth of the prophet Elijah, Ahab presented a repentance; tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his body, fasted, and went about barefoot and mourning. He put on the garment of holy fasting.

- + *“Pride serves as their necklace, violence covers them like a garment”* (Psalm 73: 6). Iniquity provides a bad cover; if anyone intends to clothe us with it, we should take it off, lest it brings us forth to judgment. And if anyone provokes us to take off our spiritual cover which we have received, we should take off from ourselves the garment of iniquity, and put on the cover of faith and perseverance by which David covered himself while fasting, lest he would lose the garment of virtue. Fasting itself, is a cover; if Joseph was not covered by it, the lustful adulteress would have bared him naked (Genesis 39: 12). And If by it, Adam had chosen to cover himself, he would not have been bared naked; But because he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, contrary to the heavenly command, and challenging the fasting which was put upon him, through eating the forbidden food (of the sensual lust); he knew that he was naked (Genesis 3:

6-11). If he has chosen to fast, he would have kept the garment of faith, and would not have seen himself naked.

Let us then keep away from clothing ourselves with iniquity and drinking wine, lest it would be said about us: *“He clothed himself with cursing as with a garment”* (Psalm 109: 18). Adam clothed himself with a bad garment, and went around searching for leaves of trees; hence he got the verdict of cursing.

(St. Ambrose)

“And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?

Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days, but in the days of his son.

I will bring the calamity on his house” (28, 29)

How amazing are the exalted mercies and goodness of God! How he desires the salvation of all! How He perpetually anticipates the repentance of everyone, to pot His blessings upon him!

+ Have we ever read about any king, more evil than Ahab; about whom the Holy Book says: *“There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord”* ...How happy was the remorse, by which he drew the eyes of the Lord! ... The confession of sin, by which the verdict already issued by the wrath of God was changed!

+ When the people gathered together in Mizpah; and the prophet Samuel proclaimed a fast, the people were strengthened and prevailed against the enemy (1 Samuel 7: 7); and utterly destroyed the Assyrian attack. The power of Sennachrib king of Assyria was broken down by the tears of king

Hezekiah, his sackcloth, and his humility by fasting (Isaiah 37: 1). The city of Ninevah, by fasting, stirred up the compassion of God, and took away the threats of His wrath (Jonah 3: 10); And now, Ahab the worst of kings, by fasting, and clothing himself in sackcloth, managed to postpone the verdict of God to generations ahead.

- + Although the sin of Ahab was the same as that of Jezebel, yet when Ahab repented, his punishment was postponed to dwell upon his (wicked) children. Whereas Jezebel, having persisted upon her wickedness, she faced her sorrowful destiny here and there.
- + The vineyard of Jezreel (the plantation of God) calls for vengeance against you, if you turn it into a garden of pleasure, and a seed for covetousness; for which God would send Elijah to proclaim to you the sufferings and death. ... I wish you bow down, and clothe yourself in sackcloth for some time, so that God would say to you what he said about Ahab: *"See! How Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I shall not bring the calamity in his days"*.
- + *Searching Ahab when he had Naboth killed, and taken possession of his vineyard, God issued the verdict to shed his blood. He sent to him the prophet Elijah to say to him, 'Have you murdered and also taken possession?'*(19). His conscience instantly struck and tormented him; he bowed his head, and walked with his eyes down to the ground. According to the Holy Book, when God saw the wicked king, clothed himself with sackcloth underneath his purple royal attire; He said, *"Because he has humbled himself before Me, I shall not bring the calamity in his days"* (29). That was the power of the fasting and the sackcloth; and how the tears of humility cleanses the blood!... That is the befitting way; of clothing yourself in sackcloth, and fasting; things that no one will see!

(St. Jerome)

- + If you wish your prayers would fly up to God, provide them with two wings:
fasting and giving.

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM 1 KINGS 21

HE MURDERED AND TOOK POSSESSION

- + The palace got narrow before the eyes of the wicked Ahab;
He hated his life, and cast himself on his bed;
He turned his face to the wall, to avoid talking to anyone;
His soul was burdened with bitterness, and his body with illness;
Poor Ahab! He was not able to have the vineyard of Naboth.
- + Looking at him, the wicked Jezebel marveled, saying,
'I wonder if my husband is a king, or a helpless kid?
Why are you sullen?
Give me your seal, and I will bring forth your heart's desire';
In few days, she came to cry out merrily: 'Here is your seal; Naboth and his
children are dead;
Arise, and go to take possession of the vineyard free. Why do you delay?'
- + Jezebel drew Ahab's heart like a humiliated captive;
To take upon himself to destroy all what is God's, and to establish idol-
worship;
She turned him into a destroyer of altars, and a killer of prophets;

She made him a murderer of a simple and a faithful believer to take possession of his vineyard;

He murdered and took possession.

+ You granted me a heart like a magnificent palace, that bears Your heavenly kingdom;

Into which no anxiety would crawl to destroy my depths;

My soul shall never covet for the vineyard of another;

You have indeed turned my depths into Your amazing paradise;

To which You invite Your angels, to turn my depths into an unceasing wedding;

Why should I murder to take possession of what is not mine?

My Christ, with His love, delivered Himself to the cross;

My Christ, was murdered to let me inherit;

He carried me with His cross up to the fellowship of His glory.

+ The wicked Ahab murdered and took possession;

As for me, I desire to be crucified together with my Savior;

To inherit the glory together with Him.

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